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THE SEARCH FOR MEANING: THE LITERATURE OF CANADIANS OF SOUTH ASIAN ORIGIN

BY

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FOREWORD

The reports in this series, commissioned by the Multicultural Sector of the Department of the Secretary of State, were completed between 1979 and 1986. The content may therefore not always reflect entirely accurately the current situation, but, as pointed out in one of the reports, the situation of the ethnic writer per se has not changed appreciably in the last few years. Only the volume of publication has increased.

My task as editor was not to "normalize" the style of the individual contributors, but to ensure first of all a reasonable degree of conformity in the kind of material provided and in the layout of this material. Beyond this, and more importantly, I was concerned with the bibliographical information, which was intended to be as full and accurate as possible. It is in this area that the greatest difficulties lie in the field of ethnic literature.

A considerable proportion of the literature published by Canadian ethnic writers appears in journals with a very limited circulation or with a very short lifespan. Such periodicals may disappear even before they have been considered for acquisition by libraries, or they may go through a series of sea-changes re-appearing here or there under a different editor and a different name. Monographic works, on the other hand, are frequently published by small presses that apparently either do not know or ignore the requirement that they deposit copies of every publication with the National Library.

Most of the works listed in these reports are therefore not to be found in the National Library, no matter whether they have appeared in Canada or, as in so many cases, abroad. And since it is by no means easy to track down the works of any given individual, unless he or she is published by a mainstream publishing house or manages somehow to rank as an established figure - if only bibliographically - much of the bibliographical information is based on secondhand sources and is at times incomplete.

The problems are compounded by the difficulties in transliterating foreign symbols and by the less rigid conventions that apply in other cultures. While there are accepted systems of transliteration in the library world, the authors of these reports have not used them, and I have not felt it essential to apply them. By the same token, many of the writers cited, particularly those from the Indian sub-continent use more then one name, depending on circumstances and personal preference. Again, no attempt has been made to produce name forms that might find official acceptance in library circles.

Given the almost total absence of bibliographical, biographical, and critical sources in this field, these reports can only be viewed as first attempts at surveying the field. The same may be said of the bibliographical information, except that in most cases more writers and works are listed than are discussed in the text and an attempt has been made to incorporate bibliographical information through 1986. I sincerely hope that these reports will encourage readers and researchers in an area of Canadian literature which is full of vitality and promise.

Michael S. Batts

PREFACE

It is with great pleasure that I submit this report, The Search for Meaning: The Literature of Canadians of South Asian Origin, the results of three years of work, to the Secretary of State. I sincerely hope that this basic research will generate discussion and further research among scholars, both South Asian and others. Perhaps more importantly, this study will, I hope, serve to bring together the South Asian Canadian writers of varying ethnic, linguistic, geographic, national, and religious backgrounds. It would be encouraging as well, if this effort were to serve the cause of bringing South Asian Canadian literature and the writers themselves to the attention of Canadians, in order that they may gain their rightful place in Canadian society. Such a consciousness-raising exercise would, one hopes, serve the larger goal of developing an increasing respect for the South Asian Canadian community in general. It is, of course, up to the community itself, and to the writers, to continue to earn this respect through their continuing contributions.

The research for this study began in 1980 and, but for the patience and continuing encouragement of Judy Young of the Multiculturalism Directorate of the Department of the Secretary of State, would probably never have been completed. For this, my special thanks to her. I would like also to thank the Multiculturalism Directorate for launching this series of enquiries into the ethnic literatures of Canada.

Many people have worked hard to bring this research to a successful conclusion. The writer-researchers of the project team, Dr. Frank Birbalsingh, Dr. Pragna Thakkar Enros, Ms. Surjeet Kalsey, and Dr. Arun Prabha Mukherjee, deserve special mention. With all her contacts and literary leadership in the Punjabi community in Vancouver, Surjeet Kalsey, assisted by her husband Ajmer Rode, was a great source of help. Frank Birbalsingh's involvement was a labour of love. Pragna Enros and Arun Mukherjee worked under very difficult conditions. Other, and earlier, members of the team, Varinder Gohal and George John in Toronto, and Shanmuga Sunderam in Vancouver, were very helpful in the basic research. My special thanks go to them also.

There were several other persons without whose help this project would not have got off the ground: Mr. Alok Mukherjee of Toronto, Dr. Brenda Beck of

Vancouver, Dr. Inder Nath Kher of Calgary, and Dr. Uma Parameswaran of Winnipeg. They served as excellent first contacts. The writers themselves were a great source of inspiration; several of them provided the literary material analysed here and useful leads to other writers and resource persons. Perhaps the widest basis of support, however, came from all those people across Canada who were most willing to give their time and share with me their knowledge.

While I thank all of these people, I believe that their best thanks is the successful completion of the project itself, so that they have proof that there exists a living and vibrant South Asian Canadian literature.

Dr. M. G. Vassanji's contribution has been of a very different nature. By inviting me to participate in the Toronto South Asian Review, and to organize a conference to mark the completion of the initial report, he has given a great and, I hope, permanent boost to South Asian Canadian literature. His wife Nurjehan has helped the project in her many silent ways. The title of this study, The Search for Meaning, has been inspired by a poem by the Punjabi poet Surinder Dhanjal. To him my thanks go as well.

Finally, the last word of thanks must be reserved for my dear wife Swarna and our children Manuja and Tamara for all their patience, understanding, and support.

Suwanda H. J. Sugunasiri

CHAPTER ONE

The Literature of Canadians of South Asian Origin: An Overview

Suwanda H.J. Sugunasiri

This study presents the findings of a Canada-wide survey of the creative writing of "Canadians of South Asian Origins" - poetry, short story, novel, and drama. Critical works, whether on literature or any other academic discipline, though voluminous, are beyond the scope of this work.[1]

South Asia is made up of seven countries, namely, Afghanistan, Bangla Desh, India, Maldive Islands, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. But people originating in South Asia have emigrated to many countries of the world and have settled in large numbers, particularly in East Africa (Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya), South Africa, the West Indies, South America (e.g., Guyana), the Fiji Islands, Mauritius, and the Malay Peninsula, and later in European countries (e.g., England and Germany), as well as in Australia, Canada, and the USA. It is, then, not only the seven countries of South Asia that have contributed to the 326,000 people referred to in the 1981 Census as "Indo-Pakistanis" and referred to in this paper as South Asians, but all of these other countries listed above as well. The term "Canadians of South Asian Origins," cumbersome as it may sound, better reflects the Canadian reality. For the sake of simplicity, however, we shall use here the phrase "South Asian Canadians."

The original invitation by the Secretary of State that led to this research called for proposals "to undertake a study of the writers and writings of any one of the groups (Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Indian, Pakistani, etc.)" (emphasis added). In submitting a proposal, however, the present editor argued that the whole of South Asia should be treated as a single unit, for two reasons. First, "much of the relevant writing is likely to come from India, which means that it may not be productive to deal with other countries separately. For example, there is likely no literature in Sinhala from Sri Lanka related to Canada." Secondly, "there is language overlap across these countries." For example, Hindi, though an official language only in India, is spoken extensively in Bangla Desh as well, not to mention the large Indian communities spread across the countries listed above. Likewise, Bengali, the official language of Bangla Desh, is an official regional language in India as well as being spoken in northern India. Punjabi, another official regional language in India, is spoken in Pakistan as well, while Ramil is a regional language in India and an official language in Sri Lanka and Singapore. Urdu, the official language in Pakistan, is spoken by a large number of Indian Moslems. Like Hindi, each of these other languages, and languages such as Gujarati, Marathi, Kannada, Sinhala, Konkani, etc., are spoken in many of the countries listed above, including Canada, where peoples of South Asian origins have settled. English, of course, is spoken in most, if not all, of the countries of South Asia and by South Asians overseas.[2]

The proposal for a wider treatment was accepted, and the research therefore sought to examine the literature written in the Canadian context in the following languages (in alphabetical order): Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Konkani, Malayalam, Marathi, Punjabi, Sinhala, Swahili, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu, and, of course, English and French. The attempt was to take into account the geographic, linguistic, ethnic, national, and religious variation of South Asian Canadians.

Notwithstanding the original intention to cover all of these languages listed, research uncovered notable literary activity in only three languages (see the next section for procedures), not including Urdu which was to be dealt with separately. The three languages are English, Punjabi, and Gujarati.

Procedures

The preliminary enquiries for this research began in Toronto with informal personal and telephone conversations with knowledgeable members of several South Asian communities, either already known to the present researcher, or who came to be known in the process of the enquiries.[3] Only a single question was posed: "Do you know of any South Asian writers or of anyone who may know of them?"

On the basis of this preliminary enquiry, work began on developing a cross-Canada list of writers, professors of literature, community leaders, organizations, and media people of South Asian origins, as well as librarians, researchers, and any others working in or likely to be knowledgeable about the South Asian Canadian scene. A letter explaining the project was sent to all available addresses; an additional personal letter was sent to writers; where possible, the letter was followed up by a telephone call. The letter was also sent to radio and television stations, primarily in Toronto, that had multicultural programs and would make public service announcements. The response to the letter, however, was both slow and sparse. It was also apparent that any information gathered through this process would be largely related only to Ontario.

It became evident that personal contact was of the utmost importance. Travelling to Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, and Montreal was therefore the next step. Vancouver not only has perhaps the largest South Asian Canadian population, but has had a major Punjabi community for over 80 years, with as many as 5000 at one point in 1908.[4] Calgary and Edmonton have large South Asian populations as well.[5] Montreal, the other major city with a South Asian population, was chosen in the hope of discovering also some French language material. At each of these locations, personal or phone interviews were conducted, again with writers and those knowledgeable in the field. A copy of the letter outlining the project was given and a response requested. The same letter was sent to other names and addresses provided by the contacts at these locations.

Travelling and meeting people personally turned out to be the most fruitful way of eliciting information. These meetings brought out the names not only of established writers of the communities, but of little known ones as well. In addition, they provided an insight into the joys and sorrows, the aspirations and frustrations of South Asian Canadian writers and potential writers, many of whom complained about the difficulty of finding a publisher.

The findings of this second step helped the researcher to decide which languages might most fruitfully be pursued in relation to the availability of Canadian material, and helped to narrow down the scope and the focus of the research. It was evident that there were only two languages in which there was any substantial literary activity: Punjabi and English. The British Columbia scene proved to be a hive of literary activity in Punjabi, reflecting the well established, "nativized" community and a unity of purpose, if not a unity of ideology. Ontario provided a second base of Punjabi activity, but to a lesser degree. Literary activity in English was spread across the country, although with a preponderance of writers in Ontario. Though nowhere close to the degree of activity in Punjabi and English, a surprising discovery was an emerging literary consciousness and activity in Gujarati, primarily in Montreal, but with some help from Toronto.

The next step was to hire researchers, one for Punjabi in Vancouver, a second for Gujarati, and a third to assist the Project Director (the present writer), the last two in Toronto. Despite the evidence that literary activity was limited to these three languages, it was felt necessary to explore further the field in Hindi, given that it is spoken by practically every Canadian of Indian, and perhaps even of Bangla Deshi and Pakistani, origin; and to explore thoroughly the field of Dravidian languages as well. To accommodate this need, three other researchers were hired, one for Hindi in Toronto and two for the Dravidian languages (one in Toronto and another in Vancouver), to make a total of six in all. Three criteria were used in selecting the researchers: (a) proficiency in the language, (b) background in literature, (c) community involvement.[6] The findings of the Hindi and the Dravidian language researchers were not different from the initial findings: that there exists no literary activity in these languages.[7] It is for this reason that this study deals only with writing in Punjabi, English, and Gujarati.

Once the languages were decided, the first task of each of the researchers was to compile or complete the compilation of a bibliography of writers and their works in each language under each genre, whether in the original or in translation. It would have been ideal if a library of all the works of South Asian Canadian writers could have been developed, but the project budget did not allow for this. Thus the research was of necessity restricted to whatever material was available in libraries, in personal collections, and from the writers themselves. This actually proved not to be too difficult. Much of the Gujarati material had appeared in three annual publications which were readily available. The English works had appeared in periodicals or books which were available through one source or another. In the case of Punjabi, the researcher herself was the best resource. She had recently been involved in research and publication activities, as editor, translator, and writer, and she was an active member of "Watno Dur," a Punjabi cultural organisation in Vancouver with a regular publication of the same name.

Once the data gathering was completed, the next step was to analyse the material under each of the four genres. The detailed findings of the study are contained in the chapters written by the respective researchers Birbalsingh, Enros, Kalsey, Mukherjee, and Sugnasiri. The work was completed in 1983.

1 a. Facts and figures; the background

The major finding of the study is the existence of a vibrant literary activity among South Asian Canadians. The following chart gives a breakdown of these writers and their works, by language, genre, and sex, the cut-off year for data collection being 1980 for Punjabi, 1981 for Gujarati and 1982 for English (although the last includes some works published or in progress in 1983):

CHART

Breakdown of major and minor South Asian Canadian writers and their works by language, genre, and sex.

	POETRY			SHORT STORY			NOVEL			DRAMA			TOTAL		
	writers/wks			writers/wks			writers/wks			writers/wks			writers/wks		
	m	f		m	f		m	f		m	f		m	f	
English major	21	7	79	6	0	11	7	1	19	2	0	2	36	8	*111
English minor	39	6	58	11	2	27	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	8	85
Punjabi major	20	1	45	3	1	5	3	0	9	3	0	5	29	2	64
Punjabi minor	26	1	48	21	2	36	-	-	-	2	0	4	49	3	88
Gujarati major	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	1	0	1
Gujarati minor	12	3	33	4	1	4	-	-	-	1	0	1	17	4	38
Subtotal major	42	8	125	9	1	16	10	1	28	5	0	7	66	10	176
Subtotal minor	77	10	139	36	5	67	-	-	-	3	0	5	116	15	211
Total	119	18	264	45	6	83	10	1	28	8	0	12	182	25	387
Column	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o

*The total does not include Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, as this work does not fit under any particular genre.

This chart shows that there are in all 207 writers (total of columns m and n), writing in English, Punjabi, and Gujarati. This figure, however, does not include 36 Punjabi poets listed by Kalsey, whose works have not been identified or analysed. However, some authors write in more than one genre and the true number of writers is actually 159. This is made up of 75 writers in English, 65 in Punjabi, and 19 in Gujarati. 21 (over 13%) of these 159 writers are women. By language, women constitute roughly 20% of the writers in English and Gujarati, and only 6% in Punjabi. Out of the South Asian population of 326,000, writers constitute .049%.

The total number of works (bottom of column o) produced by these 159 writers is shown as 387 (published, forthcoming, or in progress) in the chart. But this is clearly a gross understatement of the reality, for it does not include the thousands of individual poems or short stories included in the collections (listed under the "major" category - see below -) in the Chart. Kalsey, for example, reports that in the seventies alone more than 3000 poems were published in Punjabi. On the other hand, the figure in the Chart is somewhat inflated in that a few of the works are listed twice, where they have been published in two languages. Of the 387 works, just over half (196) are in English. Gujarati comes last with only 39 works (34 of them being poems), thus indicating a lower level of creative activity. Again, the Punjabi figure of 152 is not reflective of the real situation, because it excludes (a) the works of the 36 writers referred to above, (b) works published in journals and newspapers (7 in Canada, 24 elsewhere) other than in the The Watno Dur, the major Canadian Punjabi literary journal, and (c) works predating the contemporary era, dating back to the turn of the century.

Perhaps a better indicator of the extent of literary activity in each of the languages is the "major"-"minor" breakdown, used in relation to poetry and short stories. The term "major" refers to collections of poems and short stories, and to authors with such collections. "Minor" refers to individual works of poetry or short stories, and authors with no "major" publications. Novels, requiring as they do sustained creative activity and serious literary interest, qualify under "major," and thus no distinction is made between the two types. While such a distinction may be made in drama, at least in terms of full length plays and one-act plays, the number of works identified did not allow for such refinement. In fact, there is almost no English drama to speak of, the two works listed being translations from Punjabi, the only others being stage adaptations of two of Michael Ondaatje's works. The only Gujarati play is a short one, and thus listed as "minor."

While a general survey would show literary activity in Punjabi to be greater than that in English, the major-minor breakdown helps to refine the picture, as we note that there are only 64 major Punjabi works (column o) compared with almost twice as many (111) in English. Gujarati has only one major work. When we match the total number of major works with the total number of major authors in English and Punjabi respectively, we note that the extent of productivity in the two languages is roughly the same: 111 works by 44 authors in English and 64 works by 31 authors in Punjabi or 2-3 works per author. The same ratio holds when it comes to Punjabi poetry (45 works by 21 poets), but in English it jumps to almost 3:1 (79 works by 28 poets). There is only one major work in Gujarati by one major author. The ratio drops in the short story category - 2:1 in English, but 1:1 in Punjabi. No major short stories exist in Gujarati. The novel is perhaps the genre that most clearly defines the extent of activity in the different languages, as we observe that in English there are 19 novels by 8 novelists, compared with 9 in Punjabi by 3 novelists, and none in Gujarati. The figures in Punjabi are misleading, however, since there is only one very active novelist (Giani Kesar Singh) who has produced 5 of the 8 novels (with a sixth in progress), the other 2 works being novels in progress. By contrast, the 10 published novels in English are by 5 authors, showing a wider distribution of interest and skill. In the field of drama, in which creative activity is at its lowest, Punjabi comes out strongly with 5 works by 3 dramatists, but, as in the Punjabi novel, with only one dramatist (Ajmer Rode) dominating the field with 3 full length plays and 3 short plays.

Clearly, as in the case of any literature, the genre that is best represented, and thus most popular, both among men and women, is poetry, with 264 works by 137 poets, male and female. The actual number of works, however, is considerably higher, if we consider again the fact that the poems appearing in collections have not been listed separately in any of the languages. The short story is the next most popular (83 works by 51 authors), with drama being the least. Only in English can the novel be seen as a popular form.

*****

Our findings indicate a high level of literary activity in both Punjabi and English, and an emerging literary consciousness in Gujarati. We shall discuss the literary merits of these efforts later, but here we would like to examine some of the reasons for the existence or the absence of such activity in the context of the South Asian Canadian scene.

To begin with the Punjabi Canadian scene, the high level of literary consciousness can be attributed to several factors. One is historical. In Canada, as Kalsey writes, "Punjabi poetry began with the arrival of some Punjabi freedom fighters of the Indian Independence movement around the end of the nineteenth century ... They started writing revolutionary poems [mainly in the The Hindustan Gadar, published in San Francisco] in order to awaken the East Indian community for the independence of their motherland." The novels of the major Punjabi writer, Giani Kesar Singh, are written in this revolutionary spirit. Giani's two novels written before his arrival in Canada deal with the Indian independence movement, and four others, written in Canada, "immortalise the forgotten martyrs" of that independence movement. The seventh deals with the Canadian Punjabi martyr Mewa Singh, associated with the well-known Komagata Maru incident of 1912 (see Kalsey).

A second factor in the flourishing Punjabi literary scene is the arrival in Canada over the last fifteen or so years of a considerable number of educated Punjabis with literary consciousness, some of whom were well known writers in Punjabi, 11 of them having published one or more collections of poems before arriving in Canada. Once in Canada, they have continued to write, and in the process have inspired a large number of others to take to creative writing; they have also set up organizations such as the Watno Dur (away from home) Foundation in Vancouver and the Sikh Educational & Cultural Society in Toronto, their own journals and newspapers, and printing and publishing outlets.

The third factor is socio-psychological. Punjabi immigration to Canada began at the turn of the century. Although there were intervening "quiet years" (1921-47), when immigration dropped occasionally to zero, the Punjabi community has maintained a continuity for over 80 years. It is now a well established, third-generation Canadian community, particularly in Vancouver. The continuity of the community meant the maintenance of their ethnic identity as they went through a long process of struggle against, for example, unequal pay for equal work (e.g., in lumber mills) or ineligibility to vote or stand for public office. The more socially excluded they were and the more problems in adaptation they encountered, the more ethnocentric the community was forced to become. This contributed largely to the continuation of their traditions, among which were literature, fostered through the increasing number of Gurdwaras (temples), publications (newspapers and journals), and cultural organizations. Singing and music being an integral part of the Punjabi religious practice, poets not uncommonly had their works included in these musical presentations. The tradition of bhajan singing, and the continuing practice of poetry reading helped the process. If the Punjabi writers, the poets in particular, had an interested audience locally, it also extended beyond the shores of Canada, to India itself, and even to the USA, the UK, East Africa, South Africa, etc.

All these factors - the need for ethnic identity, the arrival of a literary elite, a revolutionary history, and technological facilities - have contributed to the relatively high level of Punjabi literary activity.

Turning to the English-language works, it is, of course, true that among these writers there are a few of Punjabi origin (about 7), but that hardly accounts for the level of activity in this medium. In fact these English-language writers come from varied ethnic, linguistic, religious, and national backgrounds (see Sugunasiri). The most plausible explanation for the high level of activity is the quality of immigration in general, based as it was on the points system, and the educational background of the writers, in particular their background in literature. All of them drew either on the socio-political history of the countries from which they originated, namely British colonial rule, or on the classical traditions of learning in their own cultures (which included a rich, also written, literature), or on both. These writers come from middle or upper class families. Where not inherited, entry into these classes came through education (missionary and/or traditional classical), which included studies in literature, both Western and heritage. As they entered the work world, some of these writers came to be part of the linguistic, if not literary, elite as teachers, university professors, newspaper editors, broadcasters, translators, and critics. Writing per se, also in English, was no unfamiliar activity, English being in fact the mother tongue of several writers, particularly of those from the West Indies or South America (e.g., Ladoo and Dabydeen).

Clearly, then, these are individuals who would have taken to creative writing, had they never left their own country, as in fact some did (e.g., Gool, Kalsey, Giani Kesar Singh, Sugunasiri, and Weerasinghe).[8] Once in Canada, several of them pursued graduate education (Ahmad, Himani Bannerji, Dabydeen, Gill, Kalsey, Ladoo, Sugunasiri), most of them specifically in literature (e.g., Dabydeen, Stephen Gill, Kalsey, Ladoo). Some, like so many other South Asian scholars (see note 1), currently teach or have taught courses in literature in Canada (Ahmad, Bannerji, Dabydeen, Lakshmi Gill, Gool, Namjoshi, Parameswaran, Sugunasiri), and are involved in the contemporary Canadian literary scene, as critics (Bannerji, Dabydeen, Gool, Lakshmi Gill, Parameswaran), publishers (Stephen Gill, Gool), journal editors (Gool, Kalsey, Sugunasiri, Vassanji), and so on. It is no doubt such a background that is reflected in the high level of activity and the potential, if not emerging, high calibre of writing in the English language. It is also not accidental that a majority of English-language writers come from Eastern Canada, the home of the second, and the more educated, wave of South Asian immigration.

There are, of course, other factors. The fact that the second wave of emigrés of South Asian origin had a command of English meant a relatively easy adjustment to Canadian society. While they experienced their share of name--calling, job discrimination, and other types of racism and humiliation, whatever they went through was nothing compared with what the early Sikhs had to go through (Buchignani, note 4 above). What the knowledge of English, and thus of Western culture, did was to allow South Asians to gain entry into the system, perhaps at lower levels than their qualifications warranted, but entry nevertheless. In other words, the settling down period was shorter, and for some perhaps less painful. Once settled (relatively speaking, for South Asians are constantly trying to improve themselves, in jobs, education, housing, etc.), the creative energies, dormant for a while, can be said to have begun to sprout with the confidence that comes also from being rooted in one's own culture. As the creative energies looked for an outlet, the lack of an audience in one's own mother tongue would have led the writers to write in English, given that each of the ethnic communities that make up the South Asian mosaic was not large enough, except of course in the case of the Punjabi, to sustain a healthy literature. Once writing in English began, or in the case of some continued, the process came to be accelerated, when these writers gradually but surely began to gain recognition, and an increasing audience.[9]

Finally, ethnic pride, promoted by the Canadian policy of multiculturalism, may also have played its role. As one way of gaining respect in a new society the writers may have sought to impress the host society by putting both their rootedness and their immigrant experience to creative use. The birth of the Toronto South Asian Review, devoted primarily to the South Asian literary scene, and the ready acceptance of it by the South Asian writers (as evidenced from the fact that over 40 writers were featured within the first year) is some evidence of such ethnic pride.

If we can cite a high level of literary activity in English and Punjabi, we can only note a paucity of material in Gujarati, as the Chart indicated. This paucity can be explained by the fact that writers in Gujarati, whether from India or Africa, are mostly professional and business people (Enros), the middle class phenomenon discussed earlier. But the lack of publishing facilities is also a factor, the only outlets being three newspapers and journals (annuals) in Toronto and Montreal. While the existence of a play suggests a literary activity at more than one level, the "play" is merely a 3-page long dialogue.

As we saw from the Chart, there is considerable literary activity among South Asian Canadians; let us now turn to what these writers are writing about and how well they do it.

2. The Works

In examining the material of the South Asian writers the researchers attempted in general to analyse the content and the quality of their works. While the detailed analyses of the material are contained in the respective chapters by

Birbalsingh, Enros, Kalsey, Mukherjee, and Sugunasiri, we shall provide here an overview of their findings, under each of the genres, poetry, short story, novel, and drama.

Poetry

If one were to pick the dominant theme that cuts across the poetry of South Asian Canadians written in English and Punjabi, though not in Gujarati, it would be the immigrant experience. This is entirely understandable, given the fact that almost all the writers are first generation immigrants. In her analysis of the selected works of 12 poets writing in English Mukherjee sees four dominant features of this theme: the poets (1) write about their loss of heritage and (2) lament that the severance of roots might lead to a loss of creativity. Thus, they (3) seek to create new metaphors, often distorting Western myths, and (4) rekindle their creativity by going back to their roots. She sees all these features encompassed in a simple poem by Dabydeen, "For the Sun-Man" which begins (here and in the following chapters, refer to the bibliography for abbreviations):

> For the Sun-Man
>
> In the Sun-Man's silence
> I walk along
> I am myself jambu
> and other exotic fruits. (EMGS)

In the "Sun-Man's silence," the "jambu" (a kind of fruit) and the Buddha are reflected in the poet's loss of heritage, and the severance of roots in the metaphors that have "dried like a rind." So "new ones have to be created," and "Hannibal's beasts" serve as an example of a Western myth for this purpose. Mukherjee concludes this initial discussion with the words: "The South Asian poet ... seems to believe in speaking for the community rather than for his personal joys and griefs. And ... he believes in making committed statements about the nature of the world."

Clearly, this statement is based on a limited sample of the selected poets, for not all the works of even those poets discussed by Mukherjee fall under this category. As an example, not much of what Weerasinghe writes would qualify, although a title like Home Again Lanka (1981), the title of one of his more recent collections, suggests a movement in that direction. In fact Mukherjee excludes Ondaatje, certainly the best known South Asian Canadian poet, from her discussion, as she does also Namjoshi, another relatively well known poet, precisely because their works do not fall into that category. She sees Ondaatje's only work in which he seeks to identify with his Sri Lankan roots, Running in the Family (1982), as a "tourist guide's vision," which "remains on the level of family history without somehow connecting the familial with the social as, for example, Richard Wright's Black Boy does." To Mukherjee, Ondaatje's and Namjoshi's poetry is "not distinctly South Asian in its themes and techniques."

The conclusion one draws, then, is that the English-language poetry of South Asian Canadians covers both extremes of the cultural (and political) spectrum, and a host of other topics in between. As Mukherjee concludes: "the South Asian Canadian poets are creating works that are highly individual and technically sophisticated. Moreover, they have a breadth and range not usually found in Canadian poetry, which is preoccupied with mythopocas of various kinds: be they Fryesque archetypes or the Black Mountain poets' nature worship."

Kalsey examines in her discussion of Punjabi poetry only "some of the significant and frequently published poets" under three categories: (a) those with Canadian content, (b) those with (exclusively or primarily) heritage cultural content, and (c) those with a mixed Canadian and heritage cultural content. Much as in the English-language poetry, the immigrant experience is a central theme, highly politicized at times, however, in the Punjabi poetry as well. Thus in the poems with Canadian content, the poets talk about farm workers, the life of immigrants, and racial incidents. But we see the range and breadth of this poetry, when we read poems dealing with life in pubs and clubs, where the Canadian intelligentsia talk about planets, the space age, rockets, wine, women, crime, Western materialistic society (seen variously as a machine, as one that turns everyone that touches it into a robot, and finally as one that brings boredom, monotony and weariness), the fall of man due to drugs, pollution, etc.

In terms of heritage cultural content, Punjabi poetry again reflects a revolutionary fervour. The poets deal with, among other things, the struggle in their homeland against social inequality, injustice, and poverty, and they attack existing social and political values, showing a touch of Marxism. Homage is paid to the martyrs of the Indian Independence Movement. The thrust of this revolutionary fervour is subsumed in Dhanjal's poem, "Search for Meanings," the inspiration for the title of this study:

> Until today I've plowed grief
> and sowed toil in my fields
> only hunger has grown out of them.
> Now like a 'fateful person'
> I'll sow guns in my fields
> Then the lava will burst out
> and the age-old hunger will burn out.
>
> On the palms of the frozen nights of December
> I'll put
> some burning red sparks
> Then out of death
> I'll search for life's meanings. (CLT 26 (1977), 31)

The cultural mix in Punjabi poetry comes primarily from the Punjabi poets' reminiscing about their past, their land of origin, from a Canadian base. "My mind is in my country, my body is in my foreign country" laments one. Even here, however, the revolutionary fervour is not lacking. In the poem "Imprisoned in Heaven," for example, the poet feels that Canada provides access to the luxuries ("a cage of gold, bird feed of silver") but does not really let him reach them ("to have wings, but not to fly"). The several poems on the social theme of women's place in a man's world, e.g., Kalsey's "A Rib of Adam" and "She: Without Face," can be seen as other examples of political themes.

If politics dominate Canadian Punjabi poetry, there are among Punjabi poets also the philosophers, the social critics, and the Romantics, dealing with universal themes, such as the triangle of "life, existence [and] half--existence," as one poet puts it, and "the chaos of machine, war and compassion," as another sees it. Romanticism, which was the prevalent form of Punjabi poetry fifty years ago, still finds a place in contemporary Punjabi poetry with about twenty poets writing poems of this type. Among the themes are the love of a beloved, waiting, pain of separation, longing for reunion, past memories of love, the search for love and affection. Dejection, sorrow, and pessimism also find their way into this type of poetry.

In sum, we could say in relation to Punjabi poetry that, although politics are in the forefront, it has a freshness, a breadth, and a range not usually found in mainstream Canadian poetry. In terms of quality there is also a range: from the very good to the very poor.

Although, on the basis of the discussion above, one can say that the English-language and the Punjabi-language poetry can be seen as a vibrant and down-to-earth, living literature, dealing with the immigrant experience and thus well rooted in the here-and-now but not quite uprooted from the then-and--there, there is very little evidence of this in the Gujarati poems (90 of them) analysed by Enros. Even in poems that deal with personal experiences we find a superficiality, tending towards Romanticism. One poet, for example, visualizes Montreal at night as a heaven he has been taken to in his dream. Another "cannot understand the attitude" of modern society in trying to conquer the universe through science. Kennedy's death upsets a third poet, but the poet is able to overcome such feelings "in the sweet company of his wife"! Another sentiment expressed is the desire to visit places in Canada and the USA. Evidence of this general trend of Romanticism is the fact that forty-four out of ninety poems are love poems: the mature love of husband and wife, both fulfilled and unfulfilled; love for the beloved in the next life; equating love with God; the happiness of love; even love for the poet's older brother. Two poems deal with separation.

As in Punjabi poetry, philosophy has its adherents in Gujarati as well. Among the topics dealt with are: life's importance, its worthlessness, its dissatisfactions, the importance of hope in life and of the different attributes of life, such as friendship, helpfulness, selfishness; the meaning of life, its struggles, its complexity; the strange ways of the human race, duties of a human being, and so on. Finally, two poems deal with religious devotion.

In conclusion, then, as the paucity itself may indicate, Gujarati poetry in Canada, must be seen as an extension of traditional poetry rather than as a literature taking root in a new soil, and consequently as being at a very early formative stage as Canadian literature, thematically as well as qualitatively.

The Short Story

As in the case of poetry, there is a spread in the theme and content in the South Asian Canadian short story as well. While some stories, both in Punjabi and English, deal with the immigrant experience, a sizeable number does not, even when set in Canada. Several stories deal with life in the homeland, either in the context of the homeland or in relation to Canada. The immigrant experience is most evident in the stories in Punjabi; among the themes dealt with are prejudice and discrimination, exploitation by relatives and community leaders, the lot of the illegal immigrant, the change of name and of values, corruption in the mills, culture shock, impressions of Canada, and the lot of the Punjabi women (wife-beating, loneliness, treatment by husband's relatives, "an incurable social disease common that affects many homes in the Punjabi community" [Kalsey]).

That, however, is the extent of the treatment of the immigrant experience. The rest of the stories based in a Canadian context deal with life in North America - violence, problem-children and inter-ethnic love relationships. In stories that are based in a home country, or a cross-cultural context, there are many themes: nostalgia, Gandhi, celebrations, separation, generational conflict, infidelity, craving for motherhood, man's place in space, the atomic age, drugs, and so on - a very wide variety. But it is a variety that signals an early stage of development, as Kalsey observes: "The art of the Punjabi short story in Canada is in its infancy." This is perhaps explained by the fact that most of these writers began to write in this genre during the seventies and after coming to Canada. Noteworthy, however, is the use of regional dialects, including the use of anglicised forms, and the change of language levels (formal language, casual speech, slang, etc.), in the style of Sanskrit dramas where the royalty spoke Sanskrit and the rest spoke a Prakrit.

Only 6 out of 79 English-language stories deal with the immigrant experience: racism, culture conflict, immigrant working-class life, getting around the law to stay behind in Canada, first impressions, and yearning for material benefits. A second theme is love - mature, dissatisfied, or unfulfilled, both in stories in the Canadian and the heritage contexts. Then there is a range of themes that do not easily fall into a neat category: values - the respected position of women in society, gratitude, helping the weak, upward mobility; social issues - prostitution and poverty; family relationships, heroes, myths and religion, feminism, and a colonial type of yearning to leave the homeland in search of greener pastures. If, as reflected in the stories, many authors feel Still close to the Island, to use the title of Dabydeen's collection of stories, a significant development in the area of the English-language short story is the entry on the scene of second-generation Canadians (e.g. Annand, Pandya), whose works bear no trace of South Asianness. Thus we see Canadian rural life and very ordinary Canadian mainstream situations depicted.

In contrast to the stories in Punjabi, the breadth seen in the English--language stories is a reflection of maturity, even though their history does not date back to earlier than 1969. But even as these early (and some later) works evidenced poor quality, some of the earliest individual stories (e.g. Ahmad's "The Kumbh Fair," Ladoo's "The Quiet Peasant") were already exhibiting a maturity that characterises later individual works (e.g., Vassanji's "Waiting for the Goddesss") as well as collections (e.g., Dabydeen's Still Close to the Island), the appearance of stories in mainstream Canadian journals giving some evidence of this quality. Needless to say, the language of these better stories "is well handled, not only in terms of structure and vocabulary, but also in terms of such literary devices as similes, metaphors, imagery, symbolism, etc." (Kalsey). The same reasons that explain the generally high level of South Asian Canadian literature also explain the quality of the English--language short stories.

When we come to Gujarati, we find that none of the five stories is even set in a Canadian context: "The problems and themes of the society the authors are living in have yet to appear in their work" (Enros). The stories use heritage themes and deal with the conflict of values, fate, the dowry system, and caste and class, along the same Romanticist lines as Gujarati poetry. As might be surmised, the quality of these stories is poor where, for example, "the theme overrides the style of writing and the story becomes more like a monologue or a series of questions in the author's mind" (Enros). The language usage also ranges from the poor to the mediocre, with an occasional use of poetic style (similes and metaphors). Clearly, then, the Gujarati stories, like the poems, reflect an early stage of development. The fact that the stories have appeared in religious publications may have contributed to the quality in the sense that the expected audience is religious rather than literary. But the significant fact is that, whatever the quality, their appearance in religious publications means the acceptance of secular literature as part of cultural life.

The Novel

When it comes to the novel, it is difficult to make a general statement about content as regards the theme of the immigrant experience. In Punjabi there is but a single published author, Giani Kesar Singh, and all his works are historical. Only one of them has anything to do with Canada, and this perhaps because Mewa Singh, the hero of the novel and a martyr of the Komagata Maru incident, happened to be a martyr and fitted well into the author's series. If this particular novel is the only one that can be said to deal with the Canadian immigrant experience, every single one can be said to be part of the general revolutionary fervour of Punjabi literature. As creative works, however, they are wanting in literary quality. The stories are constructed "by arranging the incidents and happenings in chronological order" (Kalsey), and the writer acts as historian and fiction writer at the same time. Since there is also little characterisation, Kalsey concludes that Giani Kesar Singh's works "fall short of being great novels." It is, of course, too soon to judge the quality of the novel this author is known to be working on and of novels by two other authors who are well versed in other genres.

Unlike the novels in Punjabi, at least four of the ten English-language novels published deal with life in Canada, though only two deal with the immigrant experience; the other two deal with mainstream Canadian life. While the themes of five other novels are as varied as the backgrounds of their authors, there is a single thread that unites them, namely, the life of the Third World. Two of them deal with the life of upper class South Asian women, two others with Indo-Caribbean life and a fifth with life in apartheid South Africa. The last one is more like a travelogue than a novel (Birbalsingh).

In terms of quality, the ten novels analysed in this study range from very poor to excellent. While Birbalsingh complains that one novel "does little more than report facts which the reader already knows, or assert principles which are truthful only in the sense that they are platitudinous," he sees Ladoo's two novels, Yesterdays and No Pain Like this Body "as part of a developing oeuvre," and as satisfactory first novels, though lacking in strong narrative or good plots. The Caribbean life depicted in these novels is authentic, if at times unduly harsh. The imagery is rich, the characters are well developed, and the characterisation heightened by the use of the local idiom.

Cowasjee is technically a more accomplished writer than Ladoo. His novel, Goodbye to Elsa, revolves around an Anglo-Indian professor in Western Canada who withdraws to the seclusion of an isolated house in B.C. in order to write down his last words before shooting himself. "Simply as a technical achievement - a narrative that provokes laughter - the novel is distinguished, matched in Canada only by the best of Mordecai Richler's early writing, and sometimes even recalling Leacock, except for Cowasjee's acerbity which is alien to Leacock's subtle, poised humour" (Birbalsingh). However, the author suffers from a problem that seems common to many South Asian novelists, from Gill to Gool - trying to put everying they know into the novel! Thus, the range of subjects covered in the novel is so wide that the effect of the satire weakened, and the "reader is left without any clear impression beyond a general feeling of general dissatisfaction with the state of the world" (Birbalsingh).

If Ladoo and Cowasjee rely on wit and humour, Mukherjee's two novels, The Tiger's Daughter and Wife, the only novels written by a woman and about women, can be described as attempts to bring out the inner workings of the mind of her heroines, both Indian upper class characters exposed to American culture. "Nothing confirms Ms. Mukherjee's skill as novelist so much as her insight into the heroine's mind and tolerant understanding of her inner feelings." This comment made by Birbalsingh about The Tiger's Daughter is equally valid in relation to Wife. Both works deal with conflict, the former with that between the affluent class and the rest of Indian society, following India's independence, and the latter with that between Indian and American values, particularly pertaining to women. Essentially, then, Mukherjee deals with cultural conflict, and she handles it well. Her social observations are accurate, objective, and insightful; she displays a good understanding of Indian and American societies.

Finally we come to Gool, perhaps the most intriguing, if not the most brilliant, of them all. His first work, Price, is set in South Africa and deals with apartheid. The story is developed from the point of view of an Afrikaner but in relation to an Indo-African. The Nemesis Casket is set in Canada and revolves around the unending attempt by the narrator and his wife to make sense of a wealth of material ("the casket") that has come into their possession in the form of diaries, notebooks, tapes, letters, etc., relating to three Canadian upper class and professional families.

Both Price and The Nemesis Casket contain within their pages a welter of information: the former about South African history and society and the politics of apartheid, and the latter about history, philosophy, politics, music, literature, and almost everything else, showing the wide background of the author. But in both cases, the technique is "altogether too dazzling, complicated certainly, if not obstructive" (Birbalsingh), perhaps because the author attempts to pack too much into each of his works, a feature we have observed in Cowasjee, Gill, and Ladoo as well. Not that the material is irrelevant as is sometimes the case with others, but rather that it lacks cohesion. The passages are too "episodic" in nature. Indeed, in The Nemesis Casket, the chapters are written around individual characters, and the reader is expected to make the linkages among the disconnected episodes that are developed in great detail. There is even a tendency to mislead the reader by incorporating into a paragraph here or a line there material intended to be unexpected.

While the technique Gool uses is complicated, more so in The Nemesis Casket, it has been hailed, precisely for the technique "as the most brilliant example so far" of what Sutherland[10] calls "Twentieth century Canadian Baroque," in the style of the works of Hubert Aquin, Rejean Ducharme in French, and Leonard Cohen in English. If Gool is difficult in technique, he is "extremely economical [in language usage], using a minimum of words for maximum information, and he displays a rare flexibility in switching registers, from standard English to colloquial, from teenage language to Southern American to erudite and scholarly" (Birbalsingh). In sum, Gool is probably the doyen of the South Asian novel, even though also a respected member of the Canadian literary establishment.

Drama

When it comes to drama, there is only very little activity in Gujarati and English. There is but a single three-page drama in Gujarati and no original works exist at all in English. Two of the dramas listed in the bibliography are adaptations from Ondaatje's Billy the Kid and Coming through Slaughter. The other two are translations from Punjabi: Ashok (the name of a Buddhist king in India) by Tarlochan Singh Gill and One Girl One Dream by Ajmer Rode.

By contrast, the Punjabi drama scene is an active one. There are at least three full-length plays, two by Ajmer Rode (Komagata Maru and The Strange Drama) and one by Raj Chohan (The Spark). Ajmer Rode has written at least four other one-act plays, and others are in progress. Perhaps the best evidence of the activity in Punjabi drama is that several plays have been staged to full houses.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages I have tried to give a brief overview of the nature and extent of the large body of South Asian Canadian literature and to summarize the findings of the researchers who have contributed to this volume. I hope that this summary will have sufficiently whetted the reader's appetite that he or she will now read the more detailed accounts in the individual chapters. It is self-evident that no account, however detailed or critical, can equal the aesthetic pleasure that is to be gained by reading the works themselves.

CHAPTER TWO

South Asian Canadian Poetry in English

Arun Prabha Mukherjee

The term "South Asian," as noted above, covers all the people who have originated from the Indian sub-continent (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), but who may have arrived here from countries scattered around the globe: the West Indies, British Guyana, Mauritius, Fiji, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, and European countries. It is the common racial and cultural background as well as the colonial experience that has moulded the South Asian consciousness. Thus Cyril Dabydeen, a Guyanese, and Rienzi Crusz, a Sri Lankan, feel a closeness that has been captured by this poem of Dabydeen's:

for the Sun-Man

In the sun-man's silence
I walk along
I am myself jambu
and other exotic fruits

even though I do not
pluck parables
from the Buddha's core

or wonder at ploughing
through the snow
with Hannibal's
beasts -

ah, maybe being so much
like the west
the metaphors have dried

like rind

new ones have to be created
while I too continue
to nourish
the sun
in my midst

and thinking
of rain-forests
from time to time
in the poem's
winter (EMGS, p. 51)

The sun-man the poem refers to is the mythic persona of Rienzi Crusz. The poem underlines the deep sense of identity the two poets feel, as well as their poetic strategies. The South Asian poet, though writing in English, creates his own private experience.

Dabydeen's poem is a good place to begin an analysis of the themes and strategies of South Asian poetry, as it encapsulates several dominant characteristics apparent in the work of South Asian Canadian poets.

Loss of Heritage

The most poignant feature of the poem is Dabydeen's sense of the loss of his heritage, his inability to "pluck parables / from the Buddha's core." As a descendent of indentured labourers, Dabydeen has been twice alienated. Like the Antillian poets making imaginary journeys to Africa, Dabydeen looks back to the Indian sub-continent. However, he can only sing of his alienation, his knowledge of the loss he suffered from the harsh reality of colonisation. In the poem "Elephants Make Good Stepladders" he gives expression to his yearning for India, the land of his ancestors:

how I wished for more than youthful

visits to circuses
in a colonial town
to hear a real elephant's grunt
...
with Shakuntala innocence
I experience the thrill
of monsoon magic (EMGS, p. 15)

The other South Asian poets, however, do "pluck parables" from their own cultural background. Surjeet Kalsey, for example, in her "Siddhartha Does Penance Once Again" uses the story of Buddha's leaving home and wife and child one dark night to narrate the anguish of an immigrant who has left his family behind in order to come to Canada. The myth is used ironically:

I a Siddhartha
nailing a journey to my feet
once again
    leaving the pregnant beauty asleep
    leaving my 'sumptuous palaces'
    (mortgaging my inherited land and house)
    Friends and kin
    Familiar streets my city my country
I've begun to do penance
denying my emotions and feelings ...
(my hungry body does not need, for the time being
  "spiritual enlightenment" (CLT 26 (1977), 32)

This Siddhartha, instead of finding enlightenment, becomes "one of the dumbly driven catttle." The poetess had come to Canada in search of "contentment" and "happiness." However, like "several Siddharthas," her hopes for betterment were dashed:

Every day they pack us into closed wagons
to dump us into the raspberry strawberry or blueberry fields

When the sun dives down the other side of the mountain
we are brought home shaken and tired
I throw myself into the fourth corner of the common room
swallowing several bitter draughts of somrus
Every day I try to write to you with my aching fingers
So that I may tell you
I'll come home very soon
or I'll apply for your immigration very soon
... (CLT 26 (1977), 33-34)

While this poem is quite accessible to a reader of non-South Asian background, its irony hits a South Asian much harder. While he/she feels himself/-herself to be in exile too, unlike Buddha, his/her quest or exile has usually come about through financial or career reasons. And while Buddha found spiritual enlightenment, the immigrant's enlightenment is usually a coming to terms with disillusionment. In Asoka Weerasinghe's words:

The clock strikes the midnight hour,
My bones creak under the heavy weight
Of having survived the '60s in the west.
I now feel old at thirty-three,
With my skull getting bare
With my dropping hair. ("Looking Back," SP, p. 32)

The anguish caused by displacement is unique to the immigrant's experience, and the poets, when seeking to express it, go back to the resources provided by their culture. Uma Parawesmaran's "Gangajal" is a very interesting and moving poem in this respect. It demonstrates the importance of myth as well as the impossibility of the task of translation. For gangajal is a word as sacred and pregnant to the Hindu mind as the words "cross" or "resurrection" are to a Christian. The title alerts a South Asian to the theme of the poem, for Ganges water is needed in Hindu homes to perform the last rites. It is poured into the mouth of the dying person in the hope of sending his soul to heaven. The dead body is given its final ritual bath with it as well. After cremation, the ashes of Hindus are strewn in the Ganges. The poem thus gains its urgency for the South Asian reader because of gangajal's association with imminent death:

> I heard him come in the door
> and straight to the kitchen.
> He had snowflakes in his hair
> And his face was white as any neighbour's
> All blood from it in his burning eyes.
> His boots formed an instant puddle
> as he stood at the kitchen door.
> Gangajal, he said, I need Ganga-jal.
>
> I reached over to the alcove above the fridge
> Where I've enshrined our household gods
> And took down one of the cupsize copperpots
> Sealed at a temple beside the holy river.
> His hands were trembling as I placed it there,
> And he had snowflakes in his hair.
> I'll drive, I said, following to the door
> but he patted me absently.
> as he does our little ones
> when they drift into his study
>
> Ambike, Mother, may he reach in time. (Unpublished MS)

The poem powerfully captures a very intimate aspect of South Asian life in Canada. For a person from India, especially a Hindu, it reverberates with profound memories of family rituals as well as with literary connotations. It will probably not do that for a non-Hindu, but that only points to the ritualistic nature of poetic incantation. It proves the point that poetry is culture-bound and that a poet, however highly acclaimed he/she may be in his/her own land, has no guarantee that his/her poetry will be universally appreciated.

In the poems discussed above, the poets have used their cultural lore without worrying about the uninitiated. This willingness to take risks with regard to the audience is highly courageous and shows the determination of South Asian poets to be authentic. Instead of worrying about what will sell, they prefer to be true to their own experience. Though the use of a specialized vocabulary may deter potential readers, a serious reader will certainly not be daunted by these difficulties, for the use of myth is not pedantic on the part of these writers, but highly functional.

Loss of Creativity

The second theme of Dabydeen's poem is the fear that being severed from one's roots might lead to a loss of creativity and emotional dryness. The poet feels that his "metaphors have dried / like rind." This sense of the drying-up of the fountains of the spirit is a recurrent theme in South Asian poetry. Crusz expresses this fear in the metaphor of the snow versus the sun:

> the snow that covered all:
> Anne, my John, my lilies, my weeds.
> How a film of ice spun round my skin,
> fires that sputtered to a white wind
> and died with a curse on their jaws. (EI, p. 101)

In his poem called "Apologia of a Dark Poet" the snow adopts the symbolic overtones of moral deadness. The winter landscape becomes a metaphor for the indifference and lack of concern the poet finds in society:

> I am
> a dying man's voice
> shaping words
> for a wilderness,
> for men crouched
> with snow in their eyes
> ears dull as lead. (EI, p. 51)

Uma Parameswaran's "Where Should I Begin?", the opening poem of her collection called Trishanku, (again, a mythical figure, one who was condemned by the gods to hang eternally in limbo, belonging neither to the earth nor to heaven), is also concerned with the South Asian poet's sense of loss. To Parameswaran, Trishanku is a metaphor for the immigrant experience and describes the juggling the South Asian poet constantly performs in her mind between the world of the here-and-now and the world left behind.

> There was a time
> when words came to me
> ...
> But now all is turned inside out,
> Language and feelings.
> I see the monsoon rain pour down
> like needlejets from showerhead;
> The blue white glaciers of Athabasca
> Remind me of calendar pictures;
> And the pain etched on the woman's face
> As she coaxes the smoking wood to flame
> While her child moans against the noonday pangs
> Recalls a scene in a Satyajit film. (TSAR 1:3, 12-13)

The same fear, that one's words are lost in the wilderness, is expressed in Tinni Bannerji's "Misunderstood":

> they look at her
> with empty eyes
> not hearing
> not seeing
> not caring
> who are you?
> they seem to ask
> their pencils poised

on blank paper
their words covering
the silence.
they never listen
when she talks
they hear only
what they want to hear
her problem is -
she says only
what she wants to say,
and then,
she's sorry ...   (Rikka 7:1 (1980), 19)

This poem, and others like it, point to the difficulties that the South Asians are having in assimilating. They feel unwanted and unloved. No doubt, such feelings are caused by the racial assaults, verbal as well as physical, to which South Asians have been subjected. This extremely short poem by M. Lakshmi Gill says it all:

blue ice
(O my Canada)
Can I call
   you mine
foreign sad
brown that I
   am.   ("Song," FC, p. 6)

Himani Bannerji's "Identity" expresses this feeling of rejection through the metaphor of the closed door:

Before the closed door of the world
I stand
waiting
to be

asked in
to be
approved of
to be
loved
waiting to
become. (*Sky*, p. 11)

Poems like these cannot simply be admired for their beauty and let go. They make one reflect on one's place in Canadian society. The South Asian immigrant obviously feels threatened to the core of his being. He is sad, angry, and bitter at being treated as though he were sub-human. In a prose poem entitled "Terror," Himani Bannerji gives voice to the deepest fears of the South Asian immigrants: the fears for their children:

> I think of my daughter. I grow afraid. I see designs against her deep-set in their concrete structures or embossed into their Education Act. The blue of the sky, the gold of the sun, becomes an Aryan-eyed blonde and her spiked heels dig into my bowels. (*Rikka* 6:3 (1979), 34)

The white woman in high heels, based on a woman who regularly walked near Yonge and Bloor in Toronto, carrying racist signs, has become a threatening presence. The poem is deeply disturbing, as it gives vent to the paranoia felt by this group. It poisons their cup of joy, so that they cannot take pleasure even in the day to day blessings that life provides. The blue sky, the golden sunshine, the things we prize so much in Canada, not only lose their charm, they become impregnated by the terror of the moment.

Another aspect of the fragmentation of the South Asian immigrant's sense of identity is caught by Uma Parameswaran's poem about a little boy who wants to be white. The poem's theme, unfortunately, is one which many South Asian parents experience all too frequently. It points out the deeply disturbing social problem, whose repercussions will be extremely destructive unless remedied soon:

Ma, you think you could change my name
To Jim or David or something?
...
When the snow comes, Ma,
I'll get less brown won't I?
It would be nice to be white,
more like everyone else
you know? (TSAR, 1:3, 15)

While most of these poets speak in anguished tones about their fragmented identity, Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta's poems are full of bitter mockery, mimicking the words of the media which try to justify the racism:

the natives say it's initiation
they did it to the irish
the italian the gay
but we are better
niggers
we take shit with
a smile
and a colour T.V. ("My Family," DB, p. 10)

One hopes that sensitive Canadians will hear these voices and extend friendship and reassurance. For this is not what an individual can mend on his own. The self, in order to become whole, must find acceptance from others. One can steel oneself against rejection, as Bhaggiyadatta does, but one cannot remain unscathed by it.

Creating New Metaphors

The third theme of Dabydeen's poem speaks of creating new metaphors. I have already mentioned the ingenious use of traditional mythical stories in the work of these poets. There are certainly many striking metaphors in this poetry. A number of them emerge from the employment of the names of fruits and flowers of the poets' country as symbols of the spiritual richness that they had felt in their homeland. The evocation of these names gives an exotic touch to this sort of poetry which, when not overdone, is highly effective in juxtaposing the present dreariness of existence with the happiness of the past. Both Cyril Dabydeen and Rienzi Crusz employ this method. The following poem by Crusz is an example:

> I should know
> how he once lived:
> on a fistful of rice,
> shred of dried fish,
> mango and pineapple,
> coconut milk dripping
> from his mouth.
>
> How at dawn,
> he would sit in the sun,
> with the mynah-bird
> breakfasting on the lawn,
> listen to the raven chanting
> to itself,
> the tall paddies
> murmuring with the wind
> secrets of the monsoon wind.
>
> I saw him today,
> in a skull-cap of snow, /
> crawling into his apartment
> to survive
> on ready-to-serve oatmeal
> with raisins and spice
> hot chicken-noodle soup,
> Red Cap Ale and Saturday Night Hockey. (EI, p. 20-21.)

The poem intricately blends personal feeling and social comment. The packaged nature of capitalistic civilisation is effectively contrasted with images drawn from life in Sri Lanka. There the poet was surrounded by the fruits of the earth, the harvest in the field, the songbirds. In Canada, however, he "crawls" indoors. Instead of eating fresh fruits, he survives on packaged foods. Instead of the music of the birds, he is entertained by machines. This is, of course, a theme which can be called universal, as any Canadian reading it will understand the meaning. Thus, it is not nostalgia alone, but nostalgia rendered into the service of art.

Surjeet Kalsey's "We the Migratory Birds" is another good example of the South Asian poet's originality. The ambivalence of the immigrant, who considers himself a temporary resident in Canada, is expertly caught in a metaphor of the migratory birds who have stayed on beyond the season:

> The migratory birds
> are here this season
> thinking
> we'll fly back to our home
> for sure.
>
> No one knows
> which invisible cage imprisons us?
> And the flight begins to die slowly
> in our wings
> Some of us are drawn with
> the chain
> some lag
> in the swamp
> No sun, no earth
> where to look at, where to look for
> How shall we reach the threshhold
> of our home with crumbling self?
>
> ... The next season never comes.

Every season becomes this season
to make mouths at us. (SW, p. 37)

The poem, an extended metaphor, retains its tension all the way through. The birds, foreign to these shores, lead a chained existence forged by themselves. The relationship between the word "migratory" and "immigrant" makes the poem extremely poignant. Only an immigrant poet could have forged this metaphor to express the sense of loss and homelessness.

Along with this attempt at forging a fresh language to express his unique experience, the South Asian poet adopts a technique which is quite common in the writing of Third World writers: a deliberate distortion of Western mythology. Caliban, a character who has been taken to represent the colonised by many writers in the Third World, tells Prospero that he las learnt his language in order to curse him better. The Third World writers frequently turn the accepted meanings of the West upside down, the Ariel-Caliban symbolism being a prime example. Aime Cesaire's poetry, as though it were a retort to the white man's association of black with evil, makes white the colour of death and pallor while associating vitality with black. I have already shown how Crusz's poetry polarises snow and sunshine, snow symbolising indifference and blindness. While other Canadian writers have frequently used snow to symbolise death, in Crusz's poetry its symbolises a character trait of the dominant group, at least as it appears to the poet. Similarly, for Himani Bannerji, as we have seen, the image of the high-heeled blonde becomes highly forbidding. In another of her poems she uses every poetic scalpel to mock the conventional symbolism associated with peace:

Peace with her brow of patience
downcast silent eyes and wings of the dove
treading the rubble and the dust of bombed cities
is an obscene and fugitive dream
dreamt by men in power resting awhile
before pulling the trigger at the next human being
who protests for a life with dignity. (Sky, p. 35)

The next stanzas of the poem give Peace another name, and another dress: she becomes the peasant woman of the Third World:

> Peace is the woman of Tyre and Saida
> in her ragged black dress putting back together
> the torn limbs of her child
> in a total refusal of death
> peace is the woman of Vietnam
> Whose scream is as wide as the sky:
> "Yankee murderers!" ("A Few Thoughts for Peace," Sky, p. 35)

The poem is a good example of the power of the South Asian poet's voice. It transforms the abstraction called "Peace" into a living presence by giving her "a ragged black dress." A well-read reader will probably find the reference to "wings of the dove" doubly ironic as it also happens to be the title of a novel by Henry James. One wonders whether the poet is also commenting on the ethnocentrism of a good deal of Western literature which overlooks the misery around the world in its desire to knit symmetrical forms.

A good deal of the Third World literature deliberately mocks these pretensions of Western literature; the South Asian poet has obviously been influenced by this kind of writing. In a poem entitled "To Adrienne Rich: Variations on the Theme Human," Himani Bannerji mockingly points out the evasions of a poem by Richi:

> You wrote a poem to Mrs. Rosenberg
> But you left him out
> burning on the chair next to her
> You did not see him
> She would not have done it so.
>
> Reach out your hand
> from your burning centre
> That is a hand next to you,
> skin flesh nerve

decomposable
suspended in a male form
waiting for their place among the elements.
That is also your hand,
Smell the acrid smell of his fear
That is also your fear
an animal cowering before a whip
variations on the theme human. (Sky, p. 14-15)

The poem mocks the American type of feminist who equates sex with class and it reminds her that we need human liberation, that the sloganeering of middle class American women seems grotesque when the world is suffused with "the acrid smell of ... fear," an image which powerfully captures the actuality of death. Again, the poem effectively points out the blind spots of North American writing, for, though Western critics continue to beat the drum of "universality," those of the Third World find a certain smugness in much of middle class practice. In its preoccupation with technique and middle class experience, it slides over the reality of our time. Through its priestly class of literary critics-cum-professors, it produces students who consider literature as a superior sort of pastime with no relationship to the real world. Unfortunately, many of these students happen to belong to the Third World and have been dubbed as "Ariels," a term denoting an intellectual who slavishly imitates the West. Dabydeen's "Senorita" mocks these Ariels:

This Senorita from the Dominican
Republic flashes a smile;
she tells me she has attended school
In Canada, is interested in Lope de Vega
and extols the Golden Age of Spain.

I remind her of Pablo Neruda
and Nicolas Guillen,
both closer to her home.
she still smiles, professes

a dim acquaintance with the poetry
of both, talks about water imagery
in Neruda. I remind her about the latter's
fire of love, the Cuban's revolutionary
zeal. She's not impressed.
she still smiles however.

How about the poets
of the Dominican republic?
She smiles once more. "Ah, do you
not see I have been educated
in Canada?" She protests innocently.

"Five million people there -
surely there must be poets"
I exclaim in silent rage.
Once more the Señorita smiles -
as bewitching as a metaphor. (G, p. 28)

This woman, a good example of what Frantz Fanon called the colonised mind, trivialises the "revolutionary / zeal" of the poets of her own continent by talking of their "water imagery." Of the literature of her own country she is entirely ignorant. The poem hits at several targets at once and that is its power. It mocks the English departments at Canadian universities for their narrow formalism as well as provincialism. It mimics the North American critical practice which is so adept at neutralising the subversive aspects of literature. And it blasts the Third World intellectual who so unashamedly lives off the crumbs of Western learning while remaining totally blind to his own heritage. The poem is an achievement of which Dabydeen must be proud; few Canadian poets of our time display such powers of satire.

However, from the critical reviews that Dabydeen has had, one would not think so. This Planet Earth, a collection of poems which are as pungent as the one quoted above and make us think hard about the state of the world, elicits a remark from a reviewer that echoes the "Senorita's" version of "educated in

Canada." "Though less versatile and sure in its treatment, this collection shares with Divinations recurrent dualism, especially light/dark image patterns, a concern with the "ephemeral, trivial," with people who, monstrously closed in upon themselves, seek escape or transcendence."[11] Once again we see the trick Canadian education imparts: the critic has neutralised the disturbing political content of the poems. He can see only "people" trapped in their individual destinies, whereas the poetry talks of history and of the causes of things.

Another reviewer dismisses Dabydeen's Goatsong because of its "obvious observations about poverty, love, and human cruelty."[12] Obviously, until you become ambiguous and esoteric, the Canadian critic will not take notice! The need to de-politicise the poetry is pathetic. For "human cruelty" this South Asian reader would like to substitute "imperialistic cruelty."

The fact that the latter reviewer finds "Lady Icarus" (in Goatsong) trite indicates the distance of the Canadian critic from the tendencies observed quite consistently in writers of the Third World: the desire to invert the accepted meaning of the Western myths. In my judgment "Lady Icarus" is one of the most powerful poems of the collection. Since it also provides insight into the method of South Asian poets in general, it would be useful to look at the poem as a whole:

Lady Icarus
"ordered deported - for the 5th time

You fell, you
fell from seven
stories high
tempting gravity
from the Stratchona
hotel

not skyward
only landward

like a recalcitrant
angel, Maria,
All the way
   from Ecuador

You came, wanting
desperately to stay
in Canada

   so glorious
and free - defying
another deportation
order when suddenly
your rope

of sheets and blankets
broke
no sun now melting wax
your hold snaps

   as you plunge
to sudden death
we stand on guard for thee
oh so glorious and free

O Canada O Canada   (G, p. 16)

The myth and the national anthem provide an ironic structure to the poem. The fact that Maria has escaped the immigration authorities five times in the past equates her determination quite effectively with that of the protagonist of the myth. The futility of the attempt is also quite similar. The "so glorious / and free" in lines 16 and 17 could apply to Maria and to Canada because of the syntax and makes the meaning highly ambiguous. The next reference to the phrase "oh so glorious and free" becomes highly ironic because of the sardonic "oh" which mocks the sentiment expressed in the anthem. Canada is not "glorious and free" for the Marias of Ecuador - a fact which would touch the South Asian reader very closely.

The poem virulently attacks the discrepancy between theory and practice and does it through a strikingly novel use of the Icarus myth. Indeed, the myth also hints at the mythical Canada that resides in the mind of many Third World would-be immigrants, a Canada which always eludes their grasp. This theme is reiterated in many ways in the work of South Asian writers, not only here but at home as well. Dabydeen's "Sun Fever" effectively brings out the contrast between Canada as real and Canada as it appears from Guyana:

> I return home
> after the
> December
> cold
>
> The thin people
> think I'm
> from the land
>
> of milk and honey they
> too want
>
> to fly the big
> bird
> of paradise.   (G, p. 21)

With just a few sharp details, the poem makes an ironical comment on the North-South dialogue. The "thin people" at home desperately want to come to "the land / of milk and honey." The run-on line makes the phrase applicable to Canada as well as to the "thin people." And what could be more logical than the thin people wanting "milk and honey." Canada to these Icaruses remains the stuff of legend, an inaccessible "paradise."

In Manjula Parakot's "Stranger in a Chosen Land" we see Canada from the point of view of the arrived:

Amidst my kin,
On that earth
Which gave me birth
That parched existence -
My spirit could bear

Now Here
Land of Mine Own Choice,
I am but
A Stranger in this Chosen Land. (GS, p. 61-62.)

The "Chosen Land," the "paradise," the "land of milk and honey" - the traditional descriptions of North America - are highly ironically employed by the South Asian poet. For, as we have already seen, the poems lament the state of limbo and a deadening of the soul. The paradise destroys instead of nourishing.

Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta's "My Family" also parodies the official myths of North America, the myth of equal opportunity and the myth of the self-made man:

we came
in 747's
to sink
to the bottom
of the upheld mosaic:
to push mailcarts
("Beaverbrook started this way you know") (DB, p. 9)

The poem deliberately mixes metaphors to knock down the egalitarian connotations of the multicultural mosaic (John Porter's The Vertical Mosaic seems to have been on the poet's mind). The bitter irony in the reference to Beaverbrook is very effective, and the use of "you know" along with the quotation marks underlines it as a fundamental belief of North American society.

Thus, though the South Asian's poetry seems to be "obvious observations about poverty, love, and human cruelty," what the reviewer considers to be "unheightened fact"[13] and though the South Asian poet is not afraid of making an "unoriginal observation," as Arnold Itwaru's epigraph to his collection Shattered Songs indicates, the poems gain complexity through their ironic relationship to the Western tradition of writing. Itwaru, for example, mocks his Western readers by warning them about surprises that await them:

> NOTICE
>
> ENTER THIS WILDERNESS AT YOUR OWN RISK. THERE ARE NO
> VIRGILS HERE. BEATRICE AWAITS NOWHERE. THERE ARE
> CANOEISTS, BUT YOU WILL FIND NO CHARON. YOU SHOULD
> BE WARNED THAT THE RIVERS ARE POISONOUS. OTHER THAN
> YOU THERE ARE NO DANGEROUS ANIMALS. (Nebula 17:1 (1981), 54)

The South Asian poet wants to empty the poetic landscape of its conventional landmarks, because the things he has to say are so entirely different. If he fails at times, it is because the things he wants to say are so foreign to the language he must speak, because in most cases the colonisers destroyed his native language. As Itwaru's "Thrashing, location: somewhere" asks:

> are we in silence in tenderness
> in words in lines in mazes in metaphors
> compromised?
>
> step by step
> word for word, word by word
> I bring what I cannot say
>
> feel it, hold it, set it free. (Nebula, 17:1 (1981, 62)

The inadequacy of words appears to be a recurrent theme in South Asian poetry. The last poem of Dabydeen's Goatsong laments that "words fall like / blocks of wood ... cliches." The poet wants to render the "tribe's dialect" (p. 34). Himani Bannerji's A Separate Sky also ends on the same note:

> Our words are words on a journey leaving us far behind.
> Though voices rise familiar from the shelves and shops
> they are subversive, separate and free.
> We put rivers, light, feathers and life in covers
> pressing all down with print and time.
> But they evade us
> escape the iron and the ink,
> and rise to their own separate sky. (Sky, p. 17)

The title of Bannerji's collection is very apt. It points to the alienation of the South Asian immigrant as well as to the reality that remains alien to the Westerner. I feel that there is a third, ironical, meaning to the title: the sky being one and the same everywhere, its present separation is a betrayal of the brotherhood of man. Hence the notes of anger, rage, mockery, and bitterness in this poetry. The poems are an attempt to build a bridge between the North and the South, to make the Western audience look at what lies beyond their comfortable surroundings.

In S. Padmanab's "Night-Song" the poetic persona is obviously a lover who has no indication of what the poet feels inside:

> loving you,
> I think of twisted, leprous hands,
> rains laying waste the year's harvest
> people shooting each other off
> in war
> or by accident
>
> you think I have wandered off
> in a private land of pleasure,

leaving you lonely
in your turbulence.

but love,
I will join you,
my lust a trifle late perhaps,
when I have rebuilt cities
and caused children -
to be born perfect
in a loving world.

as you lie thinking,
how long will he take. (SoS, p. 26)

The painful memories erupt in dreams or at the most tender moments of sexual consummation. The poem explains why there is so little conventional love poetry in these collections. If love needs a total forgetfulness and ecstatic surrender to the moment, the South Asian poet is unable to give it. For the reality that he has left behind has branded him eradicably:

Malformed, malformed, they are there in my sleep,
they are there when I'm awake. Explosions of
clocks and faces, of flesh and bone. I run from
them but they erupt before me. I see them, but
what are they? I've tried to forget them, to tell
myself I'm okay, you're okay, we're all okay, I've
tried to reason them out of existence ...
... behind the pages, the pictures, the streets,
children eat adults, adults eat children, they all
eat garbage, morsel to morsel, blood for blood,
spectres, carricatures, skeletons, corpses tumescent
in endless oceans.

My mother rotted in an almshouse. They dug a

canal through my father's grave. Where I was born
it is now jungle. I'm in love with a woman who wears
silk and hold [sic] her head high. (Nebula, 17:1 (1981), 55)

The poem mocks the "I'm okay, you're okay" philosophy which prescribes individual salvation. How does one get rid of these sordid realities, it asks. The South Asian poetry is, one could probably say, obsessed with the sordidness of poverty, malnourished children, oppression, and war; not necessarily in the poets' own countries. Asoka Weerasinghe's "Sahelia" describes the misery of the inhabitants of that war-torn part of Africa:

Life wrapped by naked skin
moves feebly south,
the salivary glands parched
by dessication
and each mouth
open to gobble the hot air.
They pass neo-middens
of man, bird and mammal,
smoking under the hot sun
all scaled and bare,
where there are no flowers to bear
the lily-smell of death,
of an African 'quality of life.' (PJ, p. 27)

Another aspect of the South Asian poets' preoccupation with the burning problems of the Third World countries is a sense of ambivalence about their stay in Canada. One comes across many poems that are based on self-analysis, a search for motives compelling them to stay in Canada. Recurrently, they state that somehow the poet's comfortable life is a running away, a betrayal:

I understand the shame
of the outhouse without doors
the bathroom without cover

and I am confused in Canada
because I can hardly shake a fist
at the wind; I am too tame

Sun do not rob me of this anger. ("brazil," TPE, p. 28.)

A predominant note of South Asian poetry, thus, is anguish: anguish about the poet's status in Canadian society, about the harsh realities of poverty and repression back home, and about the poet's inability to do anything to alleviate them. There is self-accusation and self-mockery at one's own lack of involvement, as well as a feeling that one has sold one's soul for comforts. Himani Bannerji's "Chile '73" is a good example:

Your voice falls on our comfort
and tears to pieces its rotten fibres
Underneath
Other voices, broken faces
Hairs billow
Order and pleas
loud and strangled
smoke to the sky
Wind brings dust
scatters ashes
on our books and songs
Colours turn grey
in falling light
and death creeps in through the geraniums. (Sky, p. 31)

Obviously, this is a dilemma unique to the South Asian poet. And unable to draw sustenance from either the literary practice of his home country or that of Canada, he has had to forge his own metaphors. If he does not succeed all the time, it is only because the task is so difficult. It is an heroic task to create when the established idiom is of no use.

Maintaining Links with the Past

Finally, Dabydeen's poem expresses the belief that "the sun," the creativity principle, can only be nourished by maintaining one's links with the past. The thought of "rain-forests" brings sustenance in "the poem's winter." A large part of South Asian poetry belongs to the genre of reminiscence. The poets write of the home scene almost compulsively. Here, I believe, they express the bittersweet nature of the immigrant experience in general. The first-generation immigrant seems doomed to live in the past, while the present seems to go by like a meaningless succession of days. Dabydeen's Elephants Make Good Stepladders ends significantly with a poem entitled "Exiles." Its being placed at the end of the collection gives it the authority of a final statement:

> Last night we gathered
> to sing old songs
> songs of politics
>
> of being far away from home
> we exchanged bouquets
> with truncated arms
>
> we listened to the country
> praise itself from afar. (EMGS, p. 52.)

Some of the poems that treat this theme are frankly exotic. The poet remembers the lushness of the scenery and the blueness of the sky, a vision which he himself contradicts in his other poems. Nonetheless, nostalgia is a genuine emotion too. And who is not guilty of seeing the past through rose-tinted glasses? Rienzi Crusz's "Faces of the Sun-Man" is a riot of the senses

>   blue Ceylon,
> where palms bend
> their coconut breasts

to the morning sun,
and Nuwera-Eliya's valley
oozes with the fragrance of tea,
the sun-stroked fishermen swearing
under their salty breath
as they clown
with the rush of toddy
in their black skulls. (EI, p. 36.)

S. Padmanab's "Pastoral" is nostalgic too, but with a slightly comic touch, for, while "rain-forests" remind one of the majesty of tropical vegetation, his pastoral has nothing to do with scenic beauty, and yet it has a power to move him:

Cleft feet
and bit grass
in a puff of flies:

bleating goats
droop treated,
dropping black beads
like chiselled gems,

pulling down
the pleated hay
of heat-hardened huts.

I don't know
what bliss there is
in a memory such as this,

or of sun-burnt
bone-thin children,

but there is
dammit,
there is. (SoS, p. 52.)

Though the South Asian poet does write of his present reality, memory is obviously his creative stimulus. The scenes and faces of his native country are etched sharply on his memory. And though stirring them is painful, to become oblivious to them would mean the death of creativity.

One of the problems with these poems might be their inacessibility to a reader unfamiliar with the country of the poet's origin. While the poems work wonderfully for the South Asian, it is questionable whether they will have the same impact on a non-South Asian reader. A case in point is Padmanab's poem "Unattended Cremation":

a man turn-
ing to ashes
on a bed
of sticks,
blue and yellow
bits of dart-
ing flame,

spreading across
a widening
sea,
to my little
town
pressed down
in snow,

and burning
slow,
all these
years,

and I hear
the sizzle
of blis-
tering skin,
crackle
of twigs,

father,
it is
too late
now. (GS, p. 56-57.)

While this poem is very moving to someone unable to attend his father's cremation, it is difficult to know how a person unacquainted with Indian funeral rites will respond to the sentiment.

However, not all memory poems are about personal pains and sorrows. Many of the poems are about political oppression in the poets' home countries. Asoka Weerasinghe's "The Birth of Insurgents," "The Insurgents," and "Plight of Insurgents" document an event that had little or no coverage in the Western media, i.e., the Sinhalese insurrection of the Janata Vimukti Peramunu in 1971:

I was at home
when April showered
guns and bullets.
Eight borrowed helicopters
droned like ailing mosquitos,
while offspring of the guilty
book-peddled in Paris and Oxford. ("The Birth of the Insurgents," HAL, p. 26.)

The poem brings out the network of relationships in which the Third World countries are tied to the Western world. One wants to know about the identity of the donor country that lent the helicopters to quell the youth rebellion.

The last two lines hint at the relationships at home. The ruling elite send their children to be educated abroad, while they bomb the children of the oppressed at home.

Another interesting aspect of political poetry by South Asian poets can be seen in Dabydeen's "Sir James Douglas: Father of British Columbia." here the poet neatly links Guyanese and Canadian history and provides an insight into colonial history that one could never gain from textbook accounts:

SIR JAMES DOUGLAS: FATHER OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(What a good a little molasses can do.")

1

You were born where I was born.
Demerara's sun in your blood,
Guiana's rain on your skin.
You came from Creole stock
taking a native wife
who hardly shadowed your
British pride
   with the 'dougla' taint.

You are part of my heritage too
despite colonialism
and bending to the rule
for a while.

2

Fever on the Frazer river now:
Victoria's ribbed veins
pulsated with the gold lust.

Settle dispute after dispute

with the Haidas;
sweet smell of molasses
in their veins, rum
dizzying their minds
while each jewel
formed the dung heap
of another claim.

They come from everywhere
Ah, keep the Americans out;
let the rabble stay far and wide
(de Cosmos loudest of all).

3

El Dorado of a different kind now.
Not the natives coming out
of their dark days after
the era of the Hudson Bay Co.
and colonial
administration

and I remember pouring sugar
in my tea in St. Mungo's city
where you were educated,
thinking if you were more Scottish
I'd be less of the tropics. (TPE, p. 41-42.)

In such poems the South Asian poet brings his cultural experience to bear on the Canadian scene, thereby giving the reader a totally new perspective on history. M. Lakshmi Gill's "Year of the Child: 1979" also straddles two worlds and combines them effectively:

Consider the brown girl with enormous eyes

seducing you guilelessly to guilt:
she gazed at the camera wondering what
that man wanted to take from her;
she had only herself to give.

Consider that after the picture taking
he walked away, job done,
while she stayed at her post
posing still in her wonder
before the spider in the dust up her toes
makes her look down and gaze at that.

Her mother calls her name, Elena,
Naliko dito, and she turns towards
the voice, the one sound which moves
her to a centre of stillness, quieting
the vertigo of hunger she knows
like heartbeat. She shares it with brothers
and sisters, flies around the dump heap.

I know her, this girl with enormous eyes. (_The First Encounter_)

The poet juxtaposes the scene on our television screen and completes the unfinished picture the television gave. Like a photographer photographing another photographer, the poem encompasses two counterpointing themes. There is the TV camera man who is only "doing his job" and digging for news wherever he may find it, remaining untouched and unattached to the object of his focus, and then there is the poet who enters into the life of Elena, and suffers personally as well (perhaps the TV cameraman had suffered too, but his medium, unlike poetry, is obviously incapable of penetrating deeply). The incorporation of the newsman gives the poem an ironic dimension that a merely nostalgic poem would have lacked, and makes the Western reader see the Western media's role in the Third World at first hand.

The "rain-forests" thus not only provide nourishment for the poet's psyche, they also result in good poetry when the poet manages to connect his past with his present.

This reliance on memory is expressed through metaphors that are suggestive of its central place in the work of South Asian poets. Cyril Dabydeen describes it as being "mudbound in memory." Arnold Itwaru uses a similar image:

the dream we do not want

do not
we who know the mud, the filth, the dust. (SS, p. 11)

Himani Bannerji's "A Letter for Home" poignantly describes her link with the past by referring to the profound rituals of her culture in words with a primal appeal:

I have walked a long way
carrying an earthen jar
With the ashes of my ancestors, earth from my land,
some grains and oil, and my cast off umbilicus.
I have buried this urn here
under my hearth, and built a fire
that I feed daily, and watch fire shapes
gather and give me news
from the other world. (Sky, p. 24)

The words here are more than metaphors. They vividly describe the irrevocable nature of the South Asian poet's relationship with the past. It is not just personal memories, but a whole tradition that the poet has brought along and it ties him to his past as though with an umbilical cord.

Just as Dabydeen's particular poem under discussion is addressed to the Sun-Man, a fellow South Asian poet, so several poems in the corpus of South Asian poets refer to artists from the Third World countries. I have already quoted Dabydeen's "Senorita." Himani Bannerji's "A Few Thoughts on Peach" refers to the "voice of Victor Jora." One of Dabydeen's poems is addressed to George Lamming. Along with these we find references to Mahatma Gandhi, Pablo Neruda, and Salvador Allende. The references help us to place this poetry in terms of its aim and fidelity. It is very firmly rooted in this world as opposed to the world of Jungian myths and archetypes, and it is strongly committed. Instead of talking of the "human condition," it talks of historical causes and effects. In place of "human nature" it puts colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, etc. The references also point to the South Asian poet's literary influences and alliances. This poetry is very close in spirit to the writing of Latin America and Africa and readers familiar with that literature will have no trouble understanding these poems.

The poems addressed to fellow immigrant poets and artists in Canada indicate that there is a network of immigrant artists, of which South Asian writers are a part. Dabydeen addresses a poem to Pier Giorgio di Cicco, an Italo-Canadian poet, while one of Himani Bannerji's poems is about an African--Canadian musician named Beverley Glen Copeland. Such poems indicate that the South Asian poets cut across national boundaries, finding inspiration and solidarity in the work of other Third World writers. One of the ways in which this solidarity is expressed is through translating poetry from their native languages into English. Sometimes the poets translate their own vernacular poetry as well. Himani Bannerji, Surjeet Kalsey, and Chinmoy Bannerji have published many translations, thus providing Canadian readers with access to a literature that is so different from their own.

It should be obvious by now that South Asian Canadian poets are creating works that are highly individual and technically sophisticated. Moreover, they have a breadth and range not usually found in Canadian poetry, which is preoccupied with mythopocas of various kinds: be they the Fryesque archetypes or the Black Mountain poets' nature worship. The South Asian poet, unlike his Canadian counterpart, seems to believe in speaking for the community rather than for his personal joys and griefs. And, unlike them, he believes in making committed statements about the nature of the world. The South Asian poet has never lived in a pre-lapsarian world, never toyed with the innocence of the unconscious animal existence and the Romantic agony of the contrast between time and eternity.

In conclusion it should be noted that Michael Ondaatje and Suniti Namjoshi have been omitted from the discussion. While both of them have won considerable acclaim for their work, they do not fit into our context. The aim here has been to isolate some distinct features of South Asian poetry, and poetry that is not distinctively South Asian in its themes and techniques, however competent it may be, has therefore been left out. It is in fact surprising to see how little these two writers write about their past. Their poetry, written in a highly obscure and allusive language, treats topics that are universal as opposed to regional or local: the problems of perception, the nature of language, the transitory nature of experience, the pains of love. One needs to be well versed in the poetry of Stevens, Eliot, Pound, and others in order to grasp their meaning. However, there are no references to the literature and myth of their own cultural background.

It appears, however, that of late these two poets are becoming aware of this gap. For example, the Feminist Fables by Namjoshi - a re-working of fables and fairy-tales - uses a few tales from the Panchtantra. Similarly, Ondaatje has recently come out with a book called Running in the Family, based on his trip to Sri Lanka. Though the book obviously fills a gap in his work in terms of his acknowledgment of his South Asian heritage, its style and the treatment of his home country are markedly different from that of the South Asian poets discussed above. The book's vision of Sri Lanka is a tourist guide's vision; it remains on the level of family history without somehow connecting the familial with the social, as, for example, Richard Wright's Black Boy does.[13] Sri Lanka is presented as a riot of colours and smells against which the drama of his family is played. However, the colours and smells gloss over the stench of poverty, inequality, and social discontent rife in Sri Lanka. To me, it seems that universalist vocabulary glosses over problem areas of human experience by running away from the particular. It is hard to mix and match topics like problems of perception and the fluidity of experience with starving children or racial prejudice. It is to be hoped that Ondaatje and Namjoshi will some day use their talents to voice the joys and sorrows of their community. Their poetry will gain in depth and power when they open the door which imprisons the South Asian aspect of their identity.

CHAPTER THREE

Brown, Black, and White: The South Asian Short Story in English

Suwanda H. J. Sugunasiri

Introduction

This chapter considers short stories written in English by Canadians of South Asian origin. Included in this category are not only people of South Asia proper (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), but also those of the West Indies, East Africa, and South America (e.g., Guyana) whose roots are in South Asia. The initial overview of the literary scene will be followed by a detailed analysis. The 79 short stories[14] that have appeared in book form or in periodicals have been published by the following writers:[17]

Ahmad, Iqbal	1
Annand, Alan M.	3
Bannerji, Himani	1
Cowasjee, Saros	12
Dabydeen, Cyril	22
Gill, Stephen	14
Hosein, Clyde	13
Itwaru, Arnold	1[15]
Kalsey, Surjeet	2
Ladoo, Harold Sonny	1
Leitao, Lino	6
Pandya, Sandy	1
Sugunasiri, Suwanda	1
Vassanji, M. G.	1
	===
	79

The bulk of these stories (69) appear in collections by Gill (1974, 14 stories), Leitao (1977, 5 stories), Cowasji (1979, 12 stories), Dabydeen (1980, 16 stories), and Hosein (1980, 13 stories). The rest appear in various publications. Three are translations by Kalsey (2) and Sugunasiri (1). Dabydeen, with one collection and six stories in other publications, is clearly the most prolific. For details see the bibliography.

The geographical context of these stories is varied, reflecting the geographical distribution of the writers:

South Asia:
  India - Ahmad, Bannerji, Cowasjee, Kalsey, Leitao
  Sri Lanka - Sugunasiri
West Indies:
  Trinidad - Hosein, Ladoo
South America:
  Guyana - Dabydeen, Itwaru
East Africa: Gill, Vassanji
Canada: Annand, Pandya.

The religious context is varied as well, given that the writers come from all the major religions of South Asia: Hindu (e.g., Bannerji), Sikh (e.g., Kalsey), Islam (e.g., Vassanji), Christian (e.g., Leitao), and Buddhist (e.g., Sugunasiri).

While 79 works by 14 writers may not appear to be a great deal, they constitute a very impressive achievement. First, the English-speaking and second wave of immigrants of South Asian origin,[16] to which the present writers belong, dates only from the 1950s, with the introduction of the quota system in 1951 and an increase in the quota in 1957.[17] The major influx, however, took place only with the introduction of the points system in 1967. The very first (English-language) short story appeared only two years later (Ahmad, 1969). Secondly, the fact that the 19 stories not drawn from the collections come from 11 authors suggests that the community has taken up the genre. Thirdly, the writers are relatively young (in their thirties, according to the best estimates) and are therefore at an early stage of their own development as writers. What the paucity, if indeed it is a paucity, suggests is an early stage in the development of South Asian Canadian literature, which for our present purposes is defined as stories written by an immigrant with a South Asian genealogy.[18]

While a detailed analysis will follow, it can be pointed out initially that there are many stories that reflect such an early stage, particularly in the earlier collections. Leitao's collection is, in fact, aptly entitle Goan Tales, because his works, as we shall see later, resemble tales rather than short stories. They are short stories only to the extent that they are the author's own creations rather than stories handed down through the ages. The length of the story is also significant. Out of the fifty-two stories, the shortest, Gill's "Aunt Disappears" (4 pages) and the longest, Leitao's "The Son" (23 pages) are among the weakest. These works also betray a lack of control in language usage.

If the picture that emerges from the two early collections is a dismal one, even the very first story to appear, Ahmad's "The Kumbh Fair" (1969), already displayed a maturing, though not yet mature, art; "The Kumbh Fair" shows an able craftsman wielding a confident pen. The three other stories that appear before 1977 (the date of Leitao's collection), by Ladoo (1973), Annand (1975), and Dabydeen (1977), are again stories of no mean quality. The subsequent stories show, in general, continuing development, with one of the two latest collections, Dabydeen's Still Close to the Island, serving as the best single-author effort in a maturing craft.

While the specific evidence for the claim of a maturing craft must await the detailed analysis, there is some internal and external evidence to fall back on initially. Perhaps the most compelling internal evidence is the fact that the content of these stories is no longer always ethnic. Confident of their art, the writers are moving into the context of their adopted land as well as of the larger world, as they seek to delve into the human experience, be it South Asian, West Indian, Canadian, European, or indeed universal. This tendency is evident even in the earliest collection (Gill, 1974). Here we find contexts covering a wide geographical range: India ("What a Mistake"), East Africa ("Two Votaries"), Canada ("Fate or Coincidence?"), and North

America ("Determination"). Dabydeen's collection of 1980 includes stories covering both the West Indian scene (e.g., "Bitter Blood"), as well as the Canadian-North American scene (e.g., "Mammita's Garden Cove"). Annand's three stories between 1974 and 1977 have nothing ethnic in them.

A second piece of internal evidence is the language usage. The language in most of the stories is well handled, not only in terms of structure and vocabulary, but also in terms of such literary devices as simile, metaphor, imagery, symbolism, etc.

As for the external evidence of a maturing craft, perhaps the most superficial is the fact that South Asian writers are increasingly featured in mainstream publications, in The Fiddlehead, Impulse, The Journal of Canadian Fiction, The Antigonish Review, Quarry, Nebula, and so on. Even though it is possible that some of the stories of South Asian writers have been published as an encouragement to new writers,[19] this could not account for every story; they need to have reached a certain standard to have been published. A second piece of external evidence is the entry of native-born and younger South Asian writers, such as Annand and Pandya, on to the literary scene. This surely is a sign that the South Asian short story is taking root in the new soil of Canadian society.

How, then, has the South Asian Canadian short story achieved such a level of maturity in such a short time? Perhaps the most plausible explanation is the quality of immigration in general, based as it was on the points system, under which points were given for, among other things, the ability to use English and the general level of education. As noted in the introduction, it was to be expected that some of these immigrants would come to be part of the linguistic, if not the literary, elite, as newspaper editors (e.g., Dabydeen, Sugunasiri), broadcasters (e.g., Kalsey, Hosein), translators (e.g., Kalsey, Sugunasiri), or critics (e.g., Sugunasiri). For them, writing, including writing in English, was not an unfamiliar activity, and they would have taken to creative writing, had they never left their own country - as some in fact had done before leaving (e.g., Kalsey, Sugunasiri). There is no doubt, then, that the high educational background is reflected in the potential, if not emerging, high calibre of work in the Canadian South Asian short stories.[20]

With this brief introduction to the South Asian Canadian short story scene, we can now move on to a detailed analysis of the works. An attempt will be made to discuss at least one piece of work by each of the fourteen writers. For the purposes of this analysis, the stories are divided into four categories: stories with Canadian content, those with heritage content, those with mixed content, and stories with non-specific content. This may seem an artificial division from a literary point of view, but it serves as a useful analytical guide, since it helps us to understand the "relationship between the Canadian experience and the cultural background of the writers," as stipulated in the original plan for this study.

Stories with Canadian Content

About one fifth of the stories fall into this category; among them are: Annand, "Able Baker One," "A Bagful of Holes," and "Rosie was a Good Old Dog"; Bannerji, "Going Home"; Dabydeen, "A Kind of Feeling," "All for Love," "A Car is Just Like an Eating Baby," "A Larger Life," "Memphis," "Mammita's Garden Cove," "Mouthful"; Gill, "London to Ottawa," "Fate or Coincidence," "Enigma," "Another Trap"; Pandya, "Practical Jokers"; and Cowasjee, "Nude Therapy," "Staff Only." Of these, only a handful, like Gill's "Another Trap" and Pandya's "Practical Jokers," have a clear plot.

In "Practical Jokers," for example, Tad persuades his fiancée to climb into a coffin in a funeral parlour and then to raise the lid in an attempt to scare Charlie, the village idiot, and have a little fun at his expense. But the scheme ends tragically, when Charlie, on seeing the lid opening (at the climax of the story), shuts it tight and thrusts a wooden stake through her! In the dénouement we learn that he had heard that vampires could be destroyed only in that way! The story is technically good. Pandya builds it up in a manner that maintains the tension to the very end. At the beginning we learn that Charlie was taken off to the madhouse, and this fact encourages us to take the whole thing as a joke. Pandya, however, gives an effective twist to the story by having Charlie, considered the village idiot, act in a rational and cool manner in the face of apparent danger. Although the story shows only the level of skill of a beginner (it was a winning entry in a literature contest[21]). Pandya holds promise as a writer.

The majority of stories in this first category have no particular plot. Annand's "A Bagful of Holes" is one such story. It is a tender story about a boy's love and care for kittens. Bobby is pained by Uncle Percy's ruthless drowning of five kittens. In order to prevent him from doing it again, Bobby cuts holes in every one of the bags that might be used for this purpose. This simple story is woven into a moving tale. We know that Bobby loves kittens; he picks one up and holds it against his chest (p. 11). His pain at the drowning is shown by Annand very effectively: "Bobby walked back to the house. The trees had all lost their leaves and the sky was dark with clouds" (p. 12). The losing of leaves symbolises both the cat's loss of all its offspring as well as Bobby's loss of his own expectations of playing with and cuddling the kittens. The sky dark with clouds speaks amply for the heavy feelings clouding his mind. Then, as he toys with his stew at suppertime immediately afterwards, "A potato kitten floated to the surface" (p. 13), symbolising how Bobby's pain kept surfacing again and again. The term "potato kitten" is again a powerful phrase, because it was in a potato sack, made heavy with a couple of bricks, that the kittens were drowned. As he sees the potato kitten, "tears went plop in his stew" (p. 13). Saddened by all this, and in protest, Bobby decides to sleep in the barn, "Not in the house with that creepy Uncle Percy" (p. 13). As a final act both of revenge and prevention, Bobby cuts the holes in the sacks. This story shows not only Annand's literary skills, but also his intimate knowledge of Canadian rural life (a point evident from another of his stories, ("Rosie was a Good Old Dog"), and as a native born, he exhibits native creative control of the language.

Bannerji's "Going Home" portrays the working of the mind of an Indian mother dying in a Canadian hospital bed, as she recollects the impact of the clash of cultures on her children's outlook, behaviour, and values: "Our children ... they don't know us ... we don't even speak the same language" (p. 23), she says inaudibly to her husband. Clearly she feels hurt. She puts it symbolically: "There was this knife that they had inserted into her body" (p. 24). But she is helpless. "She felt that she was floating, drifting down a stream ..." (p. 24). She was resentful of it all, the resentment being clearly directed at "the voice of authority" made manifest by the "white woman in a white dress" standing in front of her, ready to give a needle - another symbolism. The author effectively raises our consciousness of the issue of culture clash; however, the politician in Bannerji gets the better of the artist: "There were two ways in which they could punish you for being here. They would look through you to some object beyond you ... as though you didn't exist ... Another way ... was to concentrate their gaze on you" (p. 25). And the author takes a paragraph each to expand on the two ways!

Bannerji's strength is perhaps in the use of symbolisms and imagery: the knife to show the agony, the floating and the drifting down a stream to show the helplessness, the use of the "sari" as a symbol of her past culture; the dying woman feeling as if she were "inside a cool cave with little windows" (p. 25), the earth withdrawing all its support from Harlal, the husband, as he hears of the fading away of his wife (p. 26), and the nurse standing "with the poise of a machine" (p. 23).

The language usage may, in places, appear to the native speaker as lacking in idiomatic expression:

> Madam, he said, Madam ...
>
> ...
>
> It's my wife, Madam. She's very ill. I'm not sure what she is suffering from. She has many tubes in her. May I speak to her doctor, Madam?
>
> ...
>
> I'm afraid the doctor's gone for the night ... Do you have any complaints? ...
>
> Oh, no, madam, please no ... (P. 26)

It is not the Canadian idiom to address a nurse as "Madam." Such a speaker would not describe the serum feeding through the veins as having "many tubes in her," or answer "Oh, no, Madam, please no." However, it is the authentic South Asian idiom. It may have been the author's intent to maintain the South Asianness running through the whole story. The nurse's question, "Do you have any complaints?" however, cannot be defended from this point of view, because it is from the white nurse's mouth that the words come. It is not the Canadian way to bring up a question, unless one is faced with it, and it is not the Canadian way to put things so bluntly!

Dabydeen's "A Kind of Feeling" is a successful attempt at bringing out the workings of the mind of a student-turned-worker towards a young woman. The technique used in revealing the mind - the bulk of the story - is an effective one: getting a fellow-worker to talk about his own love life: "Funny about life, you know ... about women too - once you find the right one you want to hold on to her for keeps" (p. 88). Convinced he has found the right one, and with feelings of love welling up as well as with a desire to be nearer to her, and with the fellow-worker leaving to be with the woman he loves, the man quits his job as a labourer away from home in Quetico on Lake McKenzie. Dabydeen raises our expectations when the man, on returning home, meets the woman. But the story is given a clever twist, and the man a great disappointment, when he finds that she is engaged to be married to the very man she had said had broken with her! We are deeply moved as well, because, through the dialogue with the fellow-worker, our expectations, along with the man's, had been raised to a high level and are now suddenly brought to the ground. All this Dabydeen does without sentimentality. The young man, of course, could have been anybody, until we hear that the other student workers are "a bunch of immigrant workers." In a sense, then, one may read into the story that it is symbolic of the dashed hopes and expectations of immigrants to Canada.

In terms of style Dabydeen clearly shows mastery of the language. The week following his buddy Gerry's departure to live with the woman he loves "drifted by," showing the slow pace of the week during which he agonised over his own decision to quit. The girl's beautiful body "splayed out" on the grass. Dabydeen shows control of the Canadian idiom as well: "I envied the bastard" (i.e., Bob, the girl's boyfriend, who was in competition with him [p. 85]), "Yeah - yeah, but this chick," "No Siree ..." (p. 87).

Cowasjee's "Nude Therapy" is a story with a Saskatchewan setting. Ten men and ten women, supposedly with "problems," volunteer to attend a nude therapy session at which they are asked to undress. "Nakedness is the great leveller of social distinctions" (p. 10), says the organising psychologist, "Hugging, kissing ... permitted, but intercourse and the fondling of genitals were strictly forbidden" (p. 8). Once paired off and after finding a "quiet corner in the house," the narrator, a professor, escapes through a window with the housewife partner, naked, and drives away. They are stopped by a policeman for driving without lights, and are led home, the policeman turning out to be a former pupil of the professor.

The story is full of satire. At the beginning the group offers a prayer for the National Research Council for funding the project. Then a housewife flings a bra at the psychologist explaining the purpose of the session. Later, caught in an embarrassing position, the following dialogue ensues between the professor and the former student, now policeman:

> "I remember you well, Turner. I gave you an A, didn't I?"
> "No, sir. You gave me a C."
> My hopes were dashed. "There is no peace, saith the Lord,
> unto the wicked," I mumbled. (P. 19.)

As a final example, the men and women, wearing black goggles, stand in two rows facing each other, concentrating "on the genitals of a person of the opposite sex which we found most comfortable and relaxing" (p. 12) (this reminds one of the ancient Indian practice of Swayamwara, "self-choice," where a princess picked out a husband from a row of princes standing in line!). And to the narrator's "utter stonishment ... they [the vaginas] all looked alike, except for the hue and colour of the hair" (p. 13).

As a story, "Nude Therapy" first appears to be artificially strung together. For example, the professor has barely found a corner in the house to spend the evening with his partner, when he says, "I love you, Evemy." Again, no sooner does the professor propose to escape, than Evemy agrees. But on further analaysis we can take these sudden decisions as extensions of the "freedom acquired to disrobe emotionally," which was the expected outome of disrobing physically. It is as if the freedom to disrobe emotionally has prompted both participants to cast away reason and to act on impulse. Even though, in the case of the professor, there was reason to want to run away from it all, having spent six months at the very same house two years ago, "meditating on questions of life and death," in response to her question, "Why this running naked in the middle of the night; ... I think it just came over me" (p. 20), he is again acting on impulse. The flinging of the bra at the psychologist at the beginning, as he explains the purpose of the session, serves as another example of such impulsive and liberated behaviour, as the housewife explains later: "Something came over me ... I just felt liberated" (p. 14). The accidental meeting with the former student, however, still strikes one as artificial.

Although Cowasjee's intent may have been to satirise nudity, the story, at least to this reader, seems to get the better of the author in suggesting that nude therapy indeed works! Perhaps only for some, perhaps in limited ways, perhaps as shock therapy, but the message is that it works, for did they not feel psychologically liberated to do things that they would not have done rationally?

In terms of language usage, what we see in Cowasjee, as is expected of of a professor of English, is good mastery and control. But one sees no artistic use of the language. Perhaps the content does not allow for it. But what do stand out are words such as penis, balls, breasts, genitals, erection, vagina, vulva, arse, and so on. The words may even be functional in places, and may be intended to impress upon the Canadian reader that the author has somehow escaped his own cultural trappings! But one wonders to what extent they contribute to the aesthetic quality. Certainly, the North American reader - whether the mainstream or the South Asian reader - will not be shocked by such language. But it is a pity that Cowasjee has allowed himself to use words which would be construed as graamya (= crude, vulgar, low) in his own aesthetic tradition, and not given the benefit of that tradition to the reader. After all, the great masters of classical Indian and Sinhalese literature did deal with the subject of love and sex in all its dimensions, but their language used suggestion (dhvani, vyangya), indirect hinting (vakroti), symbolism (samketa), and so forth.

Stories with heritage content

This category can be defined as stories set in the context of the lands from which the writers hail. It is by far the largest category, with over half of them falling into it. In keeping with the varied geographical origins of the writers, these stories represent parts of South Asia, the West Indies, and East Africa. For example, the South Asian content is present in Ahmad's "The Kumbh Fair"; Cowasjee's "His Father's Medals," "Another train to Pakistan," "The Chowkidar," "The Well of the Bluebell," "A4," "The Sentry," "The General Secretary," "My Shikari's Wife," and "The Captain"; Gill's "A Pathan Soldier" and "What a Mistake"; Leitao's "The Miracle," "Armando Rodrigues," "The Son," and "The Curse"; and Sugunasiri's "Fellow Travellers." Dabydeen's "Funny Ghosts," "Bitter Blood," "A Mighty Vision," "A Vampire Life," "Mother of us All," "Antics of the Insane," "Canine Sun," "When it Rains in the Sunshine," "A Witch is Getting Married," "Go an' Play in the Traffic," and his latest story, "Across the River," reflect the South American (Guyanese) context; and Hosein's "The Signature," "Mahal," "The Jeweller," "Crow," "The Sword," "I'm a Presbyterian, Mr. Kramer," " Her House," "Bianca," "Curtains," "Shoes," and "Morris Bhaiya," and Ladoo's "The Quiet Peasant" reflect the West Indian context. Gill's "Two Votaries" and "The Younger Brother," Leitao's "The Mad Woman" and "The Slap," and Vassanji's "Waiting for the Goddess" are set in East Africa. Of these stories, there are some with a distinct plot. Examples are Gill's "What a Mistake," Leitao's "The Curse," Dabydeen's "Bitter Blood," Hosein's "The Sword," and Cowasjee's "The Sentry."

The plot of Leitao's story, "The Curse," which takes place in Goa, India, is simple: Bernardo is cursed by his sister, Marsantana, for being dishonest with a brooch that their dying mother had given him. And on his way home (he lives in a village thirty-five miles away) he jumps off the roof of the bus on which he is travelling (the bus being crowded), when a body (which turns about to be that of the madman in town) rises from a coffin, also on the roof. The story is rendered poor, however, by the artificiality of the events, lack of characterisation, and unnecessary detail. For example, Marsantana's receiving a letter just on the day Bernardo comes to help is somewhat contrived, and it is on this event that the whole story is built. Again, there is no characterisation that renders Marsantana's sudden rage at Bernardo natural. And finally, as an example of unnecessary detail, the writer takes over one and a half pages to describe the setting in the village simply in order to make the point that Marsantana's roof leaked and thus to bring her brother to repair it. There is another page about getting ready to start work on the roof (p. 4). Leitao's language usage shows a clear lack of control of the second language as well.

Dabydeen's "Bitter Blood" is the work of a skilled craftsman. It is a suspense story, in which Crabdog, a man from the village of Corentyne, is killed by someone from the village of Canje in the West Indies. Even by the killed by someone from the village of Canje in the West Indies. Even by the end of the story, the reader is still wondering whether Crabdog was killed by Bull, the village bully ("Even backra-man [= white man] from England who run the sugar estates terrified of Bull" - SCI, p. 105), or by Waz, who was dying to change jobs, from cane-cutting to selling fish, by making peace with him. The character of Bull, i.e., as a tough bully ("Bull's hand is like a sledgehammer" - p. 106), of whom even backra-man is terrified, and as one who has taken to drinking, is well developed. Despite his toughness, he is still subject to the village belief system of vampires ("ole Higue" - p. 107) and the like. In fact, the reason why Bull is so afraid of his grandma is because "he used to hear people say that ... grandma was ole Higue" (p. 107). By contrast, Chu and Curly, who play only minor roles in the story, are presented in sketchy form only. The story is tight, with no loose ends or irrelevant details.

In terms of style, Dabydeen's clear mastery of language is evident in the stories that fall into this category as well (see above/below for other stories). Another factor is his attempt to use the Caribbean dialect. As we see from "Bitter Blood," described by the author parenthetically as "A short story written in West Indian pidgin" (p. 6), he has no doubt good control of it; the dialogues bear witness to this. But perhaps his weakness is in his attempt to fuse it with standard English; he seems to lack consistency here. The opening sentence, for example, part of a narrative (non-dialogue) paragraph, is in pidgin: "When Bull is walking down Canje road everyone is looking at him, watching him twice" (p. 105). But in another paragraph we have standard English with genuine past tenses: "Suddenly he thought he saw something, darting like candle-fly before him. He remembered Crabdog suddenly" (p. 106) - contrast pidgin usage: "That meant Bull believed too [in African spirits]" (p. 107). The switch from one to the other is jarring, and one wonders why it is necessary to mix the two in the narrative passages.

Ahmad's "The Kumbh Fair," Cowasjee's "His Father's Medals," Dabydeen's "Funny Ghosts," Gill's "A Pathan Soldier," Hosein's "I'm a Presbyterian, Mr. Kramer," Ladoo's "Quiet Peasant," Sugunasiri's "Fellow Travellers," and Vassanji's "Waiting for the Goddess" are examples of stories with no particular plot, but which attempt to bring out the workings of a mind or a social relationship.

"The Kumbh Fair," for example, portrays how the individual is at the mercy of the social system. In an attempt to save Vimla, a village girl, who ends up in a city brothel against her will, Hamid, a university student, brings the police with him on his third visit to her. But, "he could not believe his ears when he heard her tell the police officer that she had come of her own accord and the question of her going back did not arise at all" (p. 51). Further, Vimla says, "No one helps a prostitute. She has to help herself" (p. 52). It is only later that Hamid understands why, when an old man says: "But she couldn't go home after what has happened ... no matter where she goes, people would be cruel to her once they knew her secret" (p. 52). Vimla's attitude revealed to Hamid the significance of a statement that she had made when he was in bed with her: "I hope they [her parents] are dead [caught in the crush of the people who had come to the Fair]" (p. 47). She knew she could not go back to them, and if the parents were dead, she could not hurt them or bring shame on them. The story is well developed through the interaction between Hamid and Vimla. The reader's sympathy is drawn to Vimla as we see how she has been a victim of circumstances. As she had kept asking people at the fair whether they had seen her parents, a man led her, on the pretext of showing her some of the injured people, to a hut, gagged her, and eventually brought her to the brothel run by his mother (p. 50).

"A Pathan Soldier" is one of Gill's better works. It portrays the workings of the mind of a soldier who is caught between loyalty to duty as a soldier and loyalty to his tribal values. David Khan had been sent to Dacca, the capital of Bangladesh, by his government on a mission to crush "the Bengalees [who] had joined non-believers to destroy the religion and integrity of Pakistan" (p. 23). But, when he could not bear to shoot an infant with his machine gun, his Captain, Captain Ayub, did it for him, calling him a coward. The incident brings back to him memories of his life in his village and how Pathans "would not tolerate the imprisonment of a woman, because she was a symbol of honour for them" (p. 28). As he longs for the terrain he left behind, he is distracted by the screams of two women being forcibly led to camp. He immediately shoots the men taking her, and he in turn is shot by his captain. As he dies, "using all his remaining strength," he kills Captain Ayub with his revolver. While this story can be said to have a plot, the intent of the writer is clearly to enter into the working of the mind of an individual. The theme is not uncommon: the clash of values. What makes this story better than most others is the fact that incidents and events are not contrived; they develop naturally. Even though the language in this story is at an acceptable level, Gill has yet to show real mastery of his second language.

"The Quiet Peasant" by Ladoo is clearly the work of an accomplished artist, unquestionably one of the best of the stories under discussion. It is a moving story of a Caribbean farmer who dies peacefully at the bottom of a well he is digging. As in life, also in death, his hopes remain unfulfilled. After digging down ten feet, there is still no water. This means that the tomatoes are going to die and "den de whiteman goin to take back de land" (p. 16). It also means that there will not be "enuff money for [his] sista to get married," because the suitor has demanded a dowry (p. 12). Thus Gobinah's death symbolises the death of the hopes of a whole family. The mother cannot work because she has contracted tuberculosis, and of the six children (five girls, one boy), five are still in (the Mission) school. Gobinah's death moves the reader all the more because he is a man of principles. For example, "Most men in Tola would have beaten their wife out of the village," presumably because they could not help their husbands in the field any more. Gobinah, however, does not do so. He pays her medical bills by selling his crops and his cattle (p. 11-12). When the last bull he is left with dies, he "could have made some money," because butchers sold the meat of dead animals. But he buries it, only to have it dug up and carried off in the night by the butchers. What we have in Gobinah, then, is a character who lives in harmony with nature; just as Hemingway's Old Man did in relation to the fish in the ocean, and millions of rural people around the world do, "he considered the animals his friend" (p. 12).

Ladoo grips our attention at the very beginning, as he introduces the character: "Gobinah wasn't the kind of man to eat in the dark" (p. 11). We begin to wonder who Gobinah is and why he would be eating in the dark anyway. Although we soon learn that he is a farmer, it is two pages before we learn that he is digging a well. The reader, however, is not held back by his curiosity as the writer unfolds Gobinah's background. And gradually he leads the reader into the well: "Perhaps Sita would have had her fair share of education, hadn't Batula [his wife] contracted consumption. With his whole mind centered on the work, and his powerful arms holding the fork, Gobinah continued digging the well" (p. 12-13). The admonitions he gives to his little son who brings his lunch are given as ordinary conversation: "Now Beta, you modder kinda sickly. A few days each week, try and go to school and learn something. Take education Beta, so wen you come a man, you wouldn't have to kill yourself for bread like me" (p. 15-16). Yet these words of advice assume pathetic dimensions when in the end we realise that they were Gobinah's last words.

In conclusion, Ladoo's story flows like a river - smooth and quiet - with one phrase leading to another, without the reader's ever being conscious of it. There is no hair-raising action, yet it moves the reader deeply, like the undercurrents of a river.

The author's use of pidgin is functional. The narrative is in standard English, but he effectively switches to pidgin for dialogue: "As if expecting the whole plantation to change miraculously, the boy looked at the tomatoes again, before saying, "De garden lookin bad, bap [pa]" (p. 14-15). The use of the local idiom by Ladoo certainly adds authenticity of character and environment, something which could not be achieved in a translated standard English.

Sugunasiri's "Fellow Traveller" is a story that portrays a relationship among three women. A single feature characterises each of them: each is suffering in her own way. The narrator's mother is nearly bed-ridden, her sister, Aunty Fair, is widowed and childless and sickly, and Wimala, the servant, has no relatives and is anaemic and sickly. Thus they are all "fellow travellers." Aunty Fair and Wimala are fellow travellers in yet another sense. They feel for each other in a way that they do not feel towards the narrator's mother. They are sisters in loneliness and suffering.

The story begins with a visit to the hospital by Aunty Fair to see Wimala. Aunty Fair urges her sister to buy Wimala a nourishing drink (Horlicks) as an additional source of food. This is turned down not only for lack of money for what the mother considers a luxury, but also because Wimala's sickness is considered to be of her own making. As a middle-class household, Wimala too, gets three square meals a day, but she still has a habit of picking over garbage on her way to the community tap. The narrator's mother thinks that it is this habit that has caused her illness. While this incident may portray the mother as a cruel woman, yet it was she who had given shelter to Wimala, when she was wandering around and was being made fun of after being kicked out of another household. It is her house that Aunty Fair also chooses, from among eight brothers and sisters, to live in on becoming widowed. In his portrayal of the mother, then, Sugunasiri seems to be urging us to understand her as a complex character, just as each of us is. While Wimala is also shown to be more attached to Aunty Fair, she is not ungrateful to the mother: "It is true that the lady beats me and scolds me, but it was she who gave me shelter" (p. 69).

Vassanji's "Waiting for the Goddess" (TSAR 1:2, 78-83) is a story about changing Indo-African society, symbolically told. At the surface level, it is a story about a person waiting to be sponsored to the United States by an Indo-African benefactress who had already left for the USA. But beneath this simple tale is a biting commentary not only on Africa, but on almost any country of the Third World. The narrator's benefactress is Didi, a woman who was "the protectress of children, the fulfiller of desires" (p. 82) and one who "has a heart" (p. 79). But she was "marked" (p. 82) and labelled "a tainted woman, the prostitute" (p. 82) for the sin of "having tea and chatting" alone with a man "from another community" (p. 82). Presumably this man is white, for his room was in the Empire House, the name being indicative of a club or rooming house of a Europe-ruled era. On a day when everyone was gathered at the temple to pay homage to the deities and to make merry, "these goondas came in, pulling her forcibly through the crowd, and shoved her roughly towards the elders" (p. 81).

The treatment of Didi reflects an emerging issue in traditional societies: changing values in love and marriage. Being alone with a "boyfriend" (p. 82) was sufficient to turn a young woman into a whore! Vassanji makes a powerful but tragic commentary on traditional society by having her shoved, symbolically, towards the elders, the guardians of traditional values. It is with their approval and blessing that the young woman is humiliated in public. Indeed they do nothing to stop the "goondas" - the thugs. The hypocrisy of traditional society is brought out powerfully by the author thus: "And let me tell you what they, begotten of whores themselves, what they are up to. On Sunday evening you can see them queueing up in Miembe Street in those yellow houses behind the potters' village. And for what? Five shillings for a black one, ten for a fair one, that's what" (p. 82). While Didi's crime was made that much more serious for being with a white man, the goondas themselves pay more for a fair one! Also, having been begotten of whores, they are the first to label one a whore, and kick others - as though in an attempt to be "holier than thou."

Clearly Didi belongs to that class of Indo-African society that is westernised and can be described as middle or upper middle class. Only such a one would dare to have a white boyfriend. Indeed, what prompts her to leave for the USA may well have been her treatment by traditional society. But her emigration symbolises an attitude prevalent in the middle class of former colonised countries as well. If harsh treatment of the deviant is the response of the traditional class to changing social values, the response of the middle class is emigration. What hurts the middle class is made clear in the following words, put into the mouth of Gulu: "The white man left, and our servants now rule from the throne" (p. 81). It is no wonder that the upper or middle classes are offended: "Only a few years ago the prime minister was a fisherman," and worse: "now Prince Phillip salutes him" (p. 87)! So, in a real sense, what Didi is running away from is as much the loss of privileges of a westernised ruling upper class as the real, or imagined, inequities emerging in a changing society. It is not accidental, then, that it is to a foreigner that Gulu pours out his mind. A dethroned class makes its complaint to an internationalist white court that had helped them to get there and stay there in the first place! Vassanji, the author, thus shows not only the hypocrisy of the traditional class but that of the westernised class as well.

The author handles the character of Gulu, the narrator and only character, well, in that it is credible. Gulu's aspirations are natural insofar as his values are those of a westernised class, if he himself does not yet belong to it. Though destitute, he watches American movies and openly tells the visitor, pointing to the people at the Hindu temple, "but I'm not one of them (p. 79). He will go to America and "talk in English," and the visitor "from there" even smells different to him (p. 78). He is also of an independent persuasion (note his criticism of his society), to the extent that he desecrates a place of worship.

While Vassanji's use of language shows good control, what calls for special comment is his use of symbolism and myth. We have already seen how the entire story, "Waiting for a Goddess," is symbolic of a whole society. But Vassanji also employs traditional symbols and myths to cut both ways: Devaji, literally "the respected god," is used to mean the traditional Hindu gods as well as the gods of a colonial society, as, for example, when Gulu leads the cheers. The picture printed on the American dollar is referred to as the American's god and given the name, Niladeva, "blue god," clearly a reference to the "green, bearded god" (p. 79) on the dollar bill. The myth is carried further: "Does he have many names, like Lord Vishnu - do they meditate on the names? Do they make offerings to him?" Then, again: "He's all powerful, they even say - more powerful than the Lord of the three worlds" (p. 79). As a final example of the effective use of myth, we have the title itself: "Waiting for the Goddess" - the "goddess" clearly as giver of the gift of emigration for a tortured soul just as much as the traditional god is said to bring about salvation for his devotees! Taken overall, "Waiting for the Goddess," although it is Vassanji's first work, is a mature work of art.

Hosein's "I'm a Presbyterian, Mr. Kramer" is a story set in the West Indies that tells how an employee loses his job for upholding ethical and indeed Christian principles. Reginald Cornelius Hassan is a man "with an external degree" working at the Caribbean Oil Co. under Mr. Kramer, a man from London, England, who boasts of having shaken Winston Churchill's hand and been at Camp X, "where men of a dying breed made this world safe for people like you" (p. 47). Pointing out also that the chairman of the company, "the very ruthless, Baron Stephan Dieter von Humboldt," is his uncle, Kramer boldly claims: "So, you see, I can do no wrong" (p. 48). All this is to silence Hassan and bend him to his will, so that Hassan will readily send the lab assistant girl to Kramer's room to be used by him. The girls themselves are unwilling. Betty openly tells Hassan: "I can't have sex with him this morning," and complains that Kramer gives only five dollars for it (p. 44). Ayesha had left the lab a month ago with bruises (p. 43), and Irma goes away, saying, "You don't know that man." It is when faced with such a situation that Hassan blurts out what he had been saying to himself earlier: "I'm a Presbyterian Mr. Kramer and I won't stand for this iniquity" (p. 45). A shocked Kramer says: "Little man, know your place ... Don't look for trouble" (p. 45) and drives terror into Hassan: "I killed a man with my bare hands the night that picture was taken" (p. 47). The writing is on the wall for Hassan. A few weeks after he has retorted with the words that shocked Kramer, he is summoned to Hewitt's office to answer a serious charge: "'Im talking about Mr. Kramer's complaint ... you've been going around telling staff ... that he's been having some, ah, sexual relationship with the girls ..." (p. 50). Irma, present in the room, denies that Kramer ever approached her. Hassan is given a choice: resign immediately or be dismissed!

"I'm a Presbyterian, Mr. Kramer" is a well written story. The character of both Kramer and Hassan are well developed in only a few lines. Kramer's arrogance is shown by his words that he can do no wrong, his ruthlessness by his reference to the uncle, "the very ruthless Baron," the criminal instinct by the reference to his killing, his behaviour through the words of the lab assistants, and his vengefulness through the plot set up against Hassan. Hassan's loyalty to the company is shown by his twenty-five years of service, his efficiency by the fact that he had served from the time of the pioneer of Green Palm soaps, Kramer's predecessor (p. 44), his Christian background by his first names, Reginald Cornelius (his grandfather's names are Indian), and his faithfulness to his convictions by his talking back to Kramer. Although from this cryptic description, the characters may appear black and white, Hosein's characters are by no means that. The story moves smoothly and all the details are functional within the overall story.

If the characters are not black and white, they are indeed white and black, symbolically speaking. For "I'm a Presbyterian, Mr. Kramer" is not merely a story of two individuals pitted against one another in an employer-employee relationship, but a white (coloniser) society pitted against a non-white (colonised) society. Kramer gets his authority by being on the managerial side, and Hassan's helplessness stems from having only authority over the lab but no real power - in other words, he is merely "a tool of the oppressor." Kramer seems to have no formal qualifications or relevant experience for the job as a miner, except his war service. But, of course, he is the Chairman's nephew and white. By contrast, Hassan has an external degree, meaning a Bachelor's degree from the University of London, a highly prestigious one in the setting of a colonised country, and twenty-five years of experience in the company - but he is Indian. Hassan, as a new convert to Christianity, is true to the teachings of moral behaviour and takes courage from his faith in standing up to Kramer, to whom traditional values have no meaning. What we have here is not the mere "iniquity," as Hassan puts it, of women employees being used by male bosses, or even of Hassan's being dismissed by Kramer, but rather the injustice of a colonial culture imposing itself on a helpless colonised culture, with all the cards stacked in its favour. The injustice is all the more evident and painful, when we see the white management taking the side of an unfair Kramer, with even Irma and Lalsingh, two oppressed employees, themselves caught in a similar plight, taking a position against Hassan.

In this sense, Hosein's story is symbolic of the general malaise of the colonised society. The strength in the story is that the author remains well behind the lines, allowing the tragedy to unfold naturally. With all the strengths of the story, however, it somehow fails to move at least this reader. Is it perhaps that Hosein is a good technician but not yet the mature artist? But judging from the varied subject matter that Hosein has tackled in his collection, The Killing of Nelson John, we can certainly expect to see many good literary works from him in the future.

Stories with Mixed Content

Into this category fall stories that serve as bridges between life in Canada and life elsewhere. Only a few stories qualify for this category: Dabydeen's "A Far Place from Home" (life in Canada and the West Indies), Hosein's "Partners" and "The Killing of Nelson John." But these stories tell us no more about these authors than we already know from stories analysed above.

Non-specific content

While most of these stories are in a particular social setting, there are some in which the setting is not easily identifiable. These are stories that can relate to any geographical, social, or cultural setting - therefore the heading: non-specific content. Dabydeen's "Everlasting Love," Gill's "Aunt Disappears" and "Death of a Dream," and Surjeet Kalsey's "Mirage in the Cave" are examples of this type. Since both Dabydeen and Gill have been discussed above, only Kalsey will be examined here.

"Mirage in the Cave" is very definitely a feminist story. Throughout the story what we read is the working of the "caves of the subconscious" (p. 128) of a woman, deserted by her man in this present life. She is angered and led to a coldness of heart: "The loneliness drew her towards the door of those red and blue compartments" (p. 126), the red and blue clearly symbolising the anger and the coldness. These feelings then take her through scenario after scenario, through civilisations "from Volga to Ganges" (p. 127), and all she sees are women who had "bruises on their bodies" (p. 127). Once she sees a young woman bound to a pole with chains (p. 127); another time women are whipped by men (p. 126-7); and yet again a man is seen "marching with a woman, instead of shoes, on his feet" (p. 128). Kalsey heightens the irony of the character of the deserted woman's husband by giving him the name Mokshdev, literally "god of liberation"!

If men have treated women badly throughout the ages, women - particularly the middle-aged and the old ones - according to the story have wronged them too. Thus we find them once "battering [the woman tied to a pole] mercilessly" (p. 127). Later, a middle-aged woman unties a young man who had been tied alongside the young woman. Then the woman "kissed his brow and putting her arm in his arm, she walked leading all the rest of the females" (p. 127). Again, it is significant that the young woman who is not untied is described as a "true picture [of a woman] in some lost civilization when woman was the Chief or General" (p. 128). So the middle-aged woman not only welcomed the young men - presumably one of whom was Mokshdev - but betrayed the cause by leading other women as well. But the refrain sounding through it all is that, whatever treatment has been meted out to women, "they had risen from the dirt, with no tears, no fears, no sighs, and no complaints" (p. 127). Indeed, even at the very end, when her hopes are shattered, as symbolised by the shards of the broken vase (p. 128), "her lips projected a smile" (p. 129).

Although at times the feminist in the author comes out ("What made woman so vulnerable afterwards? Nobody knows"; "Her only fault was that she resisted and refused to be 'the shoes' forever" [p. 128]), the story is well developed. The character of Siryana, the deserted woman, is realistic. While she is involved with and has turned blue at the injustice women have had to face over time, she still yearns for the company and warmth of man. As we have already seen, the story is symbolic, the title of the story itself, "Mirage in the Cave," being the most lucid example.[22]

A comparative note

Among the authors discussed above are five that have published collections of their stories. As the analysis of Leitao might have suggested, he is clearly the weakest of the South Asian writers. Close upon his heels comes Gill, whose works are more descriptions than stories. Cowasjee, Hosein, and Dabydeen are better writers. Both Cowasjee and Hosein, however, qualify as South Asian Canadian writers primarily because they happen to live in Canada. The content of their stories is not merely ethnic (i.e., about South Asian characters), but is set in a heritage context as well (India and West Indies respectively). The best representative of a South Asian Canadian writer is clearly Dabydeen. While there are several works revolving around ethnic characters and in a heritage setting, there are other stories that have a Canadian setting and characters that are not of South Asian origin: native

Indian, Polish, and plainly white Anglo-Celtic. Even though Dabydeen is better known for his poetry, he continues to publish in the short story field in various mainstream journals. What we have in Dabydeen is a Canadianising South Asian writer.

Of the writers who have not published collections, much could have been expected of the late Harold Sonny Ladoo, who met an untimely death in an accident in his native land. Vassanji shows great promise, as does Kalsey, if she takes to writing in English. A son of the soil to be watched in the coming years is Annand, who has already published three promising stories.

Cultural contribution

What cultural contribution do the short stories of the South Asian Canadians make? Perhaps the most obvious is the knowledge that they bring to us about the culture and values of several lands. To give just three examples: in Leitao's "The Curse" we see the ravages of the monsoon floods, that people must travel on the roof of buses, which is called "Carreira," that coffins and baskets of fish and many other things are transported in the same way along with people, that a local palm wine is called "Madam Feni" and is sold in the "taverna," that a sister would quarrel with a brother for almost any reason and bring to mind his past misdemeanours, and so on. From Dabydeen's "Bitter Blood" we learn of the social interaction among Bull, Wag, Chu, the pine-drink seller, and Curly, the villager who offers Bull drinks, indicating a cordial and friendly community spirit. Drinking is part of this living, and fishing is a major source of livelihood. In Canje, just as in other rural areas, men are the wage-earners. Upward social mobility is very much a part of Canje life, as both Wag and his wife express the conviction that their children "must go to school." The conflict in religious values between generations is evidenced as well: "His Grandma picked up the battered Bible in one corner of the room; she had put it there ages ago, hoping that Bull would read it. But she knew he never did" (SCI, p. 111). From Ahmad, finally, we learn of rather mundane things, such as people drinking milk out of earthenware cups at milk shops and of sadhus (religious intermediaries) overcharging for their services.

We also gain insight into the psyche of the people, as we read of Vimla's seeking comfort in fatalism, when facing life's problems. Vimla says, for example: "I never dreamed I would ever lead such a life. But I suppose it was my fate." It is perhaps this philosophical (or is it practical?) bent that also helps her to survive in her new, hostile and unpleasant world. It is also with great cultural interest that we read about the religious prayer-gatherings for which five million people have come together, some even wanting to die there in order to go to heaven. "He shivered and prayed," explains Vimla to Ahmed, "and my father said that God was kind and he prayed that he might die there, for the fortunate who die there go straight to heaven" (p. 49). So Vimla's hope is that they are all dead, a hope which from this point of view makes her a good daughter and a good human being! Of particular significance is the fact that the information comes firsthand, umediated by the biases of the social scientist or the textbook writer.

Secondly, the stories also provide us with an insight into the universality of the human experience. As we read these stories, we come to realise how we have similar, if not the same, hopes, fears, expectations, yearnings, etc, whether we live in a cold or a hot climate, a capitalist, socialist, or mixed economy society.

A third contribution is the different viewpoints these writers bring to the universal human experience. The lack of violence, fast-moving action, or foul language in the stories (with a few exceptions) is perhaps a gentle reminder to the Western artist, who has increasingly made these features the norm in fictional writing. The fact that these stories are woven around ordinary people is a reminder that heroes are not the only ones to be sung about, that there is music in ordinary life. A final contribution is the insight gained by the average reader into the varieties of English used around the world.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have considered all the authors currently active on the South Asian short story scene except one. The idea was to be comprehensive rather than representative. Thus the single work of six writers, as well as eight stories of writers with more than one published work, have been analysed. In selecting the latter, preference was given to the more successful works, in order to bring out the best in these writers. But in examining them, we were careful to maintain our critical perspective, not hesitating to point out the weaknesses as well. On average the South Asian Canadian short story in English may be said to have a broad range qualitatively, with the majority being a little above the mid-point. A few are quite poor, but there are also a few that show considerable maturity.

With the writers coming from different geographical backgrounds, the characters represent a wide range of origins as well: not merely South Asian and black (West Indian or East African), but white (both in native country and Canadian settings), and even Canadian native people and Canadians of other origins - therefore the title of this chapter, "Brown, Black, and White." With more Canadian characters also comes increasingly Canadian content, although the proportion of this is still low. The process of Canadianisation of content is being furthered, however, by the entry of native born and young South Asian Canadians. In terms of social class, in both content and character, the stories depict the peasantry, the urban poor, and the middle class, with no representation of the upper class, the writers themselves coming from the middle class. Reflecting the cultural diversity of the peoples under discussion, the characters come from all major religions of the region - Hindu, Muslim, and Christian, with Buddhism being the least represented.

Command of the language varies widely, with the average in this case perceptibly lower. It is poor in a few, but the majority show a good command and increasing confidence. Considering that English is only the second language of most of the writers, this is remarkable, even given the British colonial history of the countries under discussion.

In conclusion, while the South Asian Canadian short story may not have had its origins in Canada, it is perhaps the literary sapling that has all the ingredients necessary for taking fast root in the fertile Canadian multicultural soil. And it will not be long before the Canadian literary establishment will have to accept it on an equal footing.

CHAPTER FOUR

The South Asian Canadian Novel in English

Frank Birbalsingh

The English-language novel written by South Asian Canadians dates back a mere ten years, Ladoo's No Pain Like This Body (1972) and Mukherjee's The Tiger's Daughter (1972) being the first. Since then there has been an average of one novel each year, giving us a total of ten novels by five authors to date. These do not include several novels written by the well known Caribbean writer, Sam Selvon, and two by Balathandran Rajan of the University of Western Ontario, all of which were written prior to their arrival in Canada. Rajan's works, published in the UK are Too Long in the West (1966) and The Dark Dancer (1958). Selvon's novels, also published mostly in the UK, are: A Brighter Sun (1952), An Island is a World (1955), The Lonely Londoners (1956), The Housing Lark (1965), Turn Again, Tiger (1959), Ways of Sunlight (1957), I Hear Thunder, (1963), The Plains of Caroni (1970), Those Who Eat the Cascadura (1972), Moses Ascending (1975), Moses Migrating (1983) - for details see the bibliography. Excluded also is Mukherjee's Days and Nights in Calcutta (1980, written with husband Clark Blaise) which is more of a travelogue.

At least nine novels are known to be in progress: "The Devil's Ceilidh" by Hubert de Santana of Goan origin, known in Canada more as a McLean's contributor, but also as an artist (his major published work is Danby: Images of Sport, 1978); "The Gleaming Citadel" and "The Barbed Maze"[23] by Arnold Itwaru of Guyanese origin (also a poet and short-story writer); "Suffer Little Children" by Saros Cowasjee; "Operation Cordelia"[24] by Réshard Gool; and four by Cyril Dabydeen, the renowned Guyanese poet and short-story writer: "Sometimes Hard," "Apir's Fate," "A Far Place Home," and "Dark Swirl".

The work of all five novelists will be considered in this chapter - Saros Cowasjee, Stephen Gill, Réshard Gool, Harold Sonny Ladoo, and Bharati Mukherjee. Of these, Ladoo was born in Trinidad, Gool in the UK, and the others in India; and all except Ladoo know India as a dominant or formative influence in their education and upbringing. Even Ladoo, the grandchild of Indian immigrants to Trinidad, is not entirely free of Indian influence, as his novels will show. All five novelists either live now in Canada or have lived here for some time. Again, Ladoo is the exception; he died in 1973. Since the other novelists are still active as writers, it seems appropriate to start with an assessment of Ladoo's work.

Ladoo wrote two novels, No Pain Like This Body (1972) and Yesterdays (1974), both of which deal with the experience of Trinidad Indians in a rural setting. No Pain Like This Body concentrates on the routine of one family in which the father is more drunk than sober, the children are regularly beaten, one son dies, and the mother goes mad. The desperation and abandonment of such behaviour are fully matched by the abject physical deprivation of the characters, and a setting infested by poisonous snakes, scorpions, and "jumbies" which are described in the glossary as "mysterious creatures (that) lurk around the villages at night."

Even if it seems too harsh, No Pain provides a largely accurate description of Caribbean peasant life as experienced by the majority of Indian people in Trinidad and Guyana, certainly up to the 1950s and probably well beyond. This experience is a direct result of British colonialism in the Caribbean, and Ladoo's presentation of it conveys the impression of accuracy partly because of its inherent vividness, and partly because of the Trindad dialect expressions which he employs. Although the novel is written in standard English, the author's commentary is throughout infused with local speech idioms which help to authenticate the story by pinning it down to its exact Caribbean location during the early years of this century. Ladoo's dialogue, in particular, reproduces the local speech in its purest form and contributes greatly to the authentic flavour of the narrative.

The family in No Pain consists of the unnamed father (Pa), his wife (Ma), and their five children. As a result of one of his beatings or threatened beatings doled out regularly to his family, Pa chases one son, Rama, into a lagoon, following which the boy contracts pneumonia and dies. Violence and abuse, deprivation and desperation, hatred and fear are the dominant features in the lives of these characters. The quality of their lives is exactly conveyed by striking images drawn from the local background:

> Rain poured and poured over Tola. Little flashes of lightning moved as brass earrings and gold fishes in the sky. Rama and Panday walked behind Ma. They felt the sugarcane leaves bruising them; the prickles from the green leaves held on to their skins. It pained as if red ants were biting them. The ground under their feet was damp. There were layers and layers of damp and rottening cane straws on the ground. They felt their toes sinking into the straws as if they were sinking into heaps of vomit; just sinking and sinking and sinking ...
>
> Rama and Panday couldn't help getting on. They were naked and uncomfortable on the wet straws; they were cold and the straws were cold also. But rain was not wetting them; they heard the rain drops _tarat tat tarat tat tat_, but they were safe from the rain. Yet they couldn't rest; especially Rama; he was coughing worst than a dog. Dampness rose up from the earth and touched their bodies as dead fingers. The earth breathed, but they were restless. (P. 30-31)

This is life at its rawest, consisting merely of the essentials of animal existence; for the characters live in circumstances more suitable for animals than for people. Like animals, their one aim is physical survival, and for this reason they strive and struggle, bearing pain and discomfort, facing terror and frustration, and enduring every sort of human indignity.

While admitting that Ladoo's portrait is a convincing and largely accurate display of Caribbean local colour, one wonders about the extremity of horror experienced by the characters. The only hint of relief that they express is the ribald humour, for example, when they gather together in the wake following Rama's death:

> A Madrassi woman named Jasso lifted her dress above her knees and said to Pa, "You chile done dead. You eh have to worry. You coud sleep wid me a few nights till you worries past."
>
> And the one-legged villager said, "Dat woman want a good man in she ass!"
>
> And she: "Ay man, watch you one foot ass. Wen I want a man, I want a

good man. Me eh want man like you."

"But I is a man. Dont mind I have one foot. De ting between me legs not cut out you know. It hangin dere just like befo."

"Man like you does take man befo dey dead!" (P. 72-73)

This is an unlikely conversation in a situation of some solemnity where grief and lamentation are more appropriate gestures. Yet in the circumstances as described by Ladoo, such ribaldry seems in order; for it underlines the ascendancy of the will to survive in his characters, and their preoccupation with life rather than death. At the same time, both the extent of their brutal experience and the coarseness of their response seem excessive and perhaps even a little salacious. We observe a similar straining after effect in the author's description of Ma:

> But Ma was a fool. The wind didn't care and the rain didn't care. Ma was not a banana leaf; she was not strong as iron; she was not as fat as a ricebag; she was thinner than a burnt sugarcane and her hands were thinner than cutlass wire. (P. 29)

Ladoo's second novel duplicates the local colour given in his first and, to a lesser extent, the preoccupation with sordid and physical and sexual details. Not that Yesterdays is short of ribaldry and bawdy humour; but the technique seems on the whole more controlled in its selection of images and concern with physical survival. The action of Yesterdays takes place about five decades after the events in No Pain. It describes the efforts of a young Trinidad Indian to start a Hindu mission in Canada. It is a bold and somewhat preposterous venture, and we are not always certain that it is treated with due irony. Poonwa reacts to what he regards as imperialistic elements in the work of Canadian Presbyterian missionaries who, in the early years of this century, brought Christianity and education mainly to the Indian population in Trinidad and Guyana. Poonwa is angered by the fact that the Canadian missionaries taught Trinidad Indians, not least Poonwa himself, "how to worship the values of the white world" and neglected to educate their converts "in their own language." But Poonwa's mission does not get off the ground. Most of the action of the novel is taken up with obtaining financial support.

The similarity of setting in Ladoo's novels means that he is showing the same social group whose interests have shifted from the business of merely eking out a living in the first decade of this century, to some concern with their inner needs by the 1950s. Poonwa realises that there is no future for an ambitious young man like himself in his home island. As in the first novel, rum is still regarded as the great solver of all ills and a highly prized reward for talent or effort. The following passage is typical:

> Rookmin was willing to add something to the list of rum drinkers. She said that lawyers were beginning to surpass school teachers as rum drinkers. She said that the lawyers in some of the country districts were in the habit of fighting cases for a few bottles of rum. A ready example; one which Basdai knew about also, came to Rookmin's mind. She told Basdai about the lawyer who lived in Chaggyville. He had a white wife. In the night he and his wife used to undress and run through the back streets naked. Every night the young men in Chaggyville used to drag the white woman inside the sugarcane field and seduce her. The lawyer was a very brilliant man. He was educated at Oxford in England, but rum made him stupid.
>
> "Man Rook," Basdai continued, "I don't want Poonwa to stay in dis place. De only future in dis island, is drinkin rum and playing de ass. By de hook or de crook, Poonwa goin on dat mission, gal." (P. 26-27)

The two main couples in the novel are Poonwa's parents, Choonilall and Basdai, and their neighbours Sook and his wife Rookmin. Sook is the village homosexual, and much time is devoted to his sexual exploits. But the plot focuses on the cooperation of everyone, including the Hindu priest Pandit Puru, in coercing Choonilall to give financial support to Poonwa's mission.

The conditions in Yesterdays are just as adverse as in No Pain, but their account is counterpointed throughout by ribald humour, which stems from the characters' ignorance, cunning, duplicity, and unawareness of moral sanctions or social decorum. In one of the central scenes of the novel, reminiscent of V. S. Naipaul's celebrated A House for Mr. Biswas, Poonwa locks himself in his room in an attempt to frighten his father and persuade him to give him the money he needs for his mission. Choonilall is led by everyone else to believe that Poonwa is dead in his room. He brings Pandit Puru to the house.

> The priest batted his eyes, then took out a large volume of the Bhagavad Gita. He read a little, then he said to Choonilall, "You son not dead Choon."
>
> "How you know dat Baba?"
>
> "De Bhagavad Gita say dat."
>
> "So he still livin in de room?"
>
> "Yeh beta."
>
> "Den I want to talk to him Baba," Choonilall said anxiously.
>
> "Pandit Puru batted his eyes again and said, "You cant talk to him Choon."
>
> "But why Baba?"
>
> "Because he had a vision from God."
>
> "Wot de vision was about Baba?"
>
> "About de Hindu mission to Canada," the pries said.
>
> "Wot!" Choonilall shouted.
>
> "Dont bawl like dat at Baba. It not good to bawl at de Pandit." Basdai warned.
>
> "I not kiss me ass bawlin!" Choonilall shouted.
>
> "You want people to hear you business in de road?" Basdai asked hotly.
>
> "De people could hear wot de modderass dey like!" Choonilall screamed.
>
> "If you bawl like dat again, I go make de gods give you trobble till you cant take," Pandit Puru said. (P. 56)

This is pure trickery, and much of the humour in this novel derives precisely from situations involving duplicity which is both amoral and successful. The humour is also successful insofar as it detracts from the seriousness of Poonwa's proposed mission. The effect finally is farcical, one of gently piercing the pretensions and delusions of a whole community. The humour relieves the portrait of human adversity which in the first novel seems too intense and unabating in its harshness.

In the end Ladoo's two novels are best regarded as part of a developing oeuvre. The wider application of humour and relative reduction of images in the second novel represent clear advances in technique which suggest that Ladoo's career had only just begun when he met a tragic death in Trinidad at the early age of twenty-seven. Ladoo had apparently intended to write a whole series of novels dealing with the life of Trinidad Indians. His use of the fictional name of "Carib Island" instead of Trinidad, for his setting in both novels, does not appear artistically significant, although it does provide the author with the anonymity that might enable him to invent more freely, without feeling inhibited by his own association with people and places in Trinidad.

The favourable critical response which Ladoo's first two novels have attracted seems largely justified. As the initial volumes in an intended series of novels, these first two books are very promising. Their rich imagery, authentic local colour, and reproduction of pungent speech idioms are all convincing features. Neither novel has strong narrative interest, although the plot of Yesterdays is more clearly directed, because it follows the outcome of Poonwa's plans for his mission. Despite the generally more controlled technique of Yesterdays, however, this second novel still contains traces of the over-indulgence noticed in No Pain. The display of presumably exotic Caribbean social background is too eagerly presented, and especially its more outlandish aspects, involving ribald speech, uninhibited sexual activity, physical violence, and widespread duplicity. No doubt the prospect of a Canadian audience has something to do with Ladoo's eager portrait of human adversity in the first novel, and the superabundance of bawdy and scatalogical reference in the second. Sook's homosexual relationships, for example, are explicitly documented, again and again, when their relevance to the unfolding of the plot is less than crucial. More than that, both the male and female characters seem to talk about their sexual activities and bowel movements unnecessarily. The pervasive association of sex and excretion seems excessive; nor does it convey the ironic implications which might render a note of consistent criticism.

If there is a danger of critical evaluations which praise Ladoo's novels out of misguided sympathy promoted by his untimely death, it can be avoided by paying attention to the solid aspects of his artistic achievement - his vivid descriptions, rich imagery, and hilarious dialogue. Over-indulgence in all three of these areas is an acknowledged weakness, probably produced by the demands of a foreign reading audience and the technical inexperience of an author in his first two books. The technical improvements noticed in the second novel nevertheless indicate the progress Ladoo was making in his career as a novelist. To avoid sentimental appraisal, therefore, we must take Ladoo's novels as they stand and judge him on what he has done, rather than on what he might have done. Here, for example, is his portrait of a Canadian woman teacher in Yesterdays:

> There had been a white school mistress, a Canadian blonde; it was her job to teach the infants. She was a heavy woman with a large bottom. She used to jump up and down like a mule and flog the children severely. Full of apostolic conviction, she used her teaching job as a platform to wage war against the heathen children.
>
> She was precise; with her blue eyes she saw the Hindu children journeying to hell and the young Christians marching to heaven. She did all in her power to sustain the Christian march. She never flogged a Christian convert. But for the Hindus there was always the rod; they were going to hell anyway. Sometimes she used to offer sweets to the Hindu children. When they reached out to take one, she pulled back her hand and said, "Sweets are only for those who love Jesus." (P. 38-39)

The stereotypical outline of this brief portrait illustrates the generalised method of character study found in Ladoo's novels. Psychological insight is not set at a premium, and the relationships between characters seem obvious, uncomplicated, even superficial. In the example just quoted, Ladoo's Canadian teacher embodies all the elements of over-zealous proselytising, sexual repression, and racism that must have existed in various combinations and degrees in some Canadian missionaries at least. Her portrait inevitably seems over-indulgent or exaggerated. Ladoo's emphasis is in the accuracy and vividness of the broad stereotype of such missionaries rather than in the psychological exactness of their individual behaviour. This emphasis is evident throughout both novels, and this is why they are notable more for their social reproduction than for anything else; and this is why his artistic achievement remains predominantly that of a local colorist who evokes, in broadly authentic outlines, the general features of the people and places he describes.

The second novelist, Saros Cowasjee, is technically a more accomplished writer that Ladoo. His novel, Goodbye to Elsa (1974) contains more wit, humour and irony than Ladoo's two novels, even if it lacks quite the same richness of imagery. Cowasjee's aim is more obviously satirical, and Goodbye deploys its satire in the fashion of the black humour of the 1960s. The story is told by an Anglo-Indian who teaches history in a university in Western Canada, and who has withdrawn to the seclusion of an isolated house in rural British Columbia, in order to write down his last words before shooting himself. The situation itself is comical, self-mocking, and the tone of the novel is the same. What we get from Tristan's improbable account is a reasoned commentary and perceptive analysis of his past life often expressed in wildly funny terms. Simply as a technical achievement - a narrative that provokes laughter - the novel is distinguished, matched in Canada only by the best of Mordecai Richler's early writing, and sometimes even recalling Leacock, except for Cowasjee's acerbity, which is alien to Leacock's subtle, poised humour.

Tristan is probably approaching middle age, when he composes his autobiography, which consists of three main sections, his early life in India, his university days in the British Isles, and his career as a professor in Western Canada. Of the three sections, the British one is the longest and best, describing Tristan's sexual escapades with several girls and his troubled, farcical relationships with other Indian students or potential rivals. These sexual episodes are hilarious. Typical is a conversation between Tristan and Rajeshwar Dayal, President of the India Association. Tristan asks Dayal about Lydia, a member of his Association, who apparently had an abortion after being left pregnant by one of her fellow whites. Dayal replies:

> "No. Let me tell you that it is not true. Amul made her [Lydia] pregnant, and as he could not pay for her abortion he appealed to me. To protect his reputation and not to set a precedent for paying for

> abortions, I gave out that she was pregnanted by a white man and then deserted. And that the India Association, which is free of class colour, creed and conscience, helped a white woman against a Satanic white man. It helped to build our international image."
>
> "All the same you cannot call her a good girl," I protested.
>
> "Why not? What is wrong with sex? Besides Amul did it orally - I mean manually - by hand."
>
> "I don't understand."
>
> "He put his sperms into her by hand. It can be done." (REFERENCE)

The self-contradiction is debasing and joins with the purely mechanical description of sex to achieve the reductionist satirical aim of the novel in deflating notions of human self-importance and virtue, social respectability, and moral order. The novel is entirely successful in this aim, and Tristan's autobiographical account reveals chaos and disorder everywhere.

Whether the object of satire is Indian students in Britain, provincial attitudes in Canada, or sexual permissiveness the world over, Cowasjee demonstrates a keen analytic mind, formidable technical skill, and a wide knowledge of history, culture, and literature. His account of Canadian academic life, for example, is well observed, closely analysed, and trenchant in effect. The History Department in which Tristan works, once employed a fellow Indian professor Cursetjee, who made enemies because he said that "Canadians have no history to talk about." Cursetjee left to work in the USA:

> He [Cursetjee] was described to me variously as a gentleman, a scholar, an editor, a go-getter, a hack writer, a plagiarist, and a bounder. What led to his departaure was the initiation of the Notikeewin Historical Review, of which he wanted to be the editor. And there were many who thought that he should be the editor. But he didn't have a wife to promote his case, and the choice fell on Dr. Horace Peabody: a dapper little man with a handlebar moustache, who walked with an awkward, shuffling gait. He had never edited a magazine, but his wife owned an art shop and was the President of the Faculty Wives' Association - a most powerful body on campus. He also

> had the most colourful doctoral gown west of Suez, which he wore when engaged in solemn pursuits such as editing and writing poetry. (P. 91)

The exposure of provincial self-importance, academic rivalry, pettiness, and vanity are worthy of Stephen Leacock. There are many such exposures throughout the novel, revealed with the same effortless fluency and wit.

Perhaps Cowasjee's experience as a journalist contributes to the smooth, palatable fluency of his writing. As an academic, a critic, and the author of several books, he brings a professional awareness of literature to his writing. Yet the ease of flow of his writing is not an unmixed blessing. The range of subjects covered in the novel is so wide that the effect of the satire is inevitably scattered and dispersed. The writer's own vast knowledge and literary enthusiasm encourage his treatment of such a variety of subjects and characters, including many mistresses and wives, that the effect in the end is, if not confusing, at best indeterminate. The reader is left without any clear impression beyond a feeling of general dissatisfaction with the state of the world. The pill of dissatisfaction is certainly well coated with comic liveliness and exuberance, and it is an ungrateful reader who would not find it palatable. What is doubtful is the possible therapeutic value of the pill itself. The implied criticism of so many subjects appears anarchic and detracts from the intellectual coherence of the novel. At the same time, one has to admit that this is a criticism that emerges only towards the end, after one has sampled a rich display of wit and humour and the ironic exposure of many examples of human frailty.

The next novelist for consideration, Bharati Mukherjee, relies rather less on wit, irony, and humour, although some of these elements undoubtedly appear in her first novel The Tiger's Daughter (1971). The "Bengal Tiger" of the title is Bannerjee, an affluent, upper-class Bengali, who is the father of the heroine Tara. Tara is educated by Roman Catholic nuns at St. Blaise's, the school apparently frequented by the moneyed, Westernised, upper-class Indians of Calcutta. Tara continues her education in the USA. She also marries an American, David Cartwright, who is never seen in the novel, although Tara refers to him occasionally and receives letters from him. With her return to India as Mrs. Cartwright, the main action of the novel begins. Having left her husband in the USA, Tara is re-united with her Bengali clan of relatives and friends in India. She is invited to numerous parties and assorted social occasions, at which she is shown something of the new conditions in India. She realises that in post-Independence India, presumably in the 1960s, the privileged class to which she belongs is under attack. Although the heroine's observations centre in the beginning mostly on the social and cultural differences between India and America, these observations gradually incorporate her increasing awareness of political affairs and of the social convulsion which is building up all over Calcutta.

Her social observations themselves are accurate, objective, and insightful. Once she is back in Calcutta, cosily ensconced among family and friends, Tara begins to learn how much things have changed since she went abroad. There are now "violent stories of pickpockets and rape." At the same time, her relatives and friends are eager to learn from her "what happens when Bengali girls go to America." These American-Indian cultural comparisons form the major interest of the novel:

> She [Tara] described to them in detail how she spent a typical day in New York, what she ate for breakfast, how much the subway token cost, how she washed and hung her nylons above the bathtub, what her thesis director looked like. Pronob wondered if the American quarter resembled the fifty-naye-paise coin, and if petrol was as expensive ther. as it was in Calcutta. He turned down the radio, so he could listen better to Tara. (P. 58)

The passage not only illustrates the cultural interests that form the core of the novel; it also inobtrusively introduces the political events that are brewing as a part of the oncoming elections.

Tara's life in the USA introduces her to social and political ideas which inevitably affect whatever Old World notions of social organisation she might have inherited from her privileged upbringing in Bengali affluence. Nor does this suggest that Tara has been transformed into a violent revolutionary or anarchist of the type that flourished in the USA during the 1960s. Such a transformation would be implausible in someone of Tara's temperament and background. But she seems to favour democratic social change. The tension between Old and New World cultural and political values in Tara's mind is rendered with subtlety and great delicacy. Nothing confirms Ms. Mukherjee's skill as novelist so much as her insight into the heroine's mind and tolerant understanding of her inner feelings.

Tara's greatest problem is to reconcile, on the one hand, the outrage of her family and friends over what they regard as a breakdown of law and order, with, on the other hand, the dissatisfaction with the existing law and order which is shown to be spontaneous and widespread, the natural and righteous reaction to years of ingrained injustice. Tara's solution to this conflict is to adopt a neutral "bridging" stance, which appears to be completely objective. Yet her ostensible objectivity is not as complete as it appears. Sanjay Basu, assistant editor of the Calcutta Observer, writes a typically reactionary editorial, saying in part: "It is inconceivable that in this day and age of Calcutta's enlightenment a militant majority should try to impose its fierce will on a responsible tax-paying minority" (p. 147). The editorial is read by Washington McDowell, a black American visitor to Calcutta, who cannot fail to make a connection between the Calcutta "goondahs" or rioters, and his fellow blacks who were causing similar disturbances in cities in the USA. In the following quotation McDowell reads Sanjay's editorial, while Tara's friend Reena voices the stock position of her family and friends:

> The assistant editor stared shyly at the teen-age visitor, then handed him a clipping of a recent editorial he had written for his paper. "I'd be delighted to have your opinion, my dear sir."
>
> "We're in the midst of a bloodcurdling election campaign," explained Reena. "All those goondahs who stopped us are on the other side, of course.
>
> Tara sensed the moment required her "bridging" functions. McDowell's sympathies were probably with the goondahs. It would be impossible to explain to Reena that Washington McDowell was the other side, that when he returned to Watts he would make fun of Camac Street girls like Reena, that one day at Berkeley perhaps he too would slash cars and riot. (P. 146)

The identification of McDowell with the rioters, and Tara's consequently enforced role of mediation between him and her friends reinforce the conflict between her American-acquired attitudes and loyalty to the more traditional attitudes of her family. Tara's mediating role is a clever device which not only enables the author to represent the real conflict in Tara's mind between democracy and reaction, but also to suggest her democratic preferences without relaxing the heroine's consciously encouraged objectivity or neutrality. The aggressive tone of the rioters and the defensive mood of Tara's clique strongly hint at the inevitability of social change. Thus the novel presents Tara as an objective, neutral observer while at the same time she calls for political change. It is a mark of the author's skill to express political preference in her novel and maintain an objective stance in doing so.

Insofar as The Tiger's Daughter reproduces the social life of upper-class people in post-Independence India, it is reminiscent of the fiction of Nayantara Sahgal, who also presents fluent evocations of Western-educated, affluent Indian society in such novels as This Time of Morning and A Time to be Happy. The Tiger's Daughter evokes India with the same fluency and with a rather stronger degree of political commitment. As Pandit Nehru's niece, Ms. Sahgal had access to material which makes her novels seem authoritatively informed about Indian political affairs, but because of the same material, her fiction runs the danger of being mere reportage. There is no such danger in The Tiger's Daughter, which weaves cultural observations and political concerns into an independent work of fiction with insights, concerns, and revelations of its own.

Ms. Mukherjee's second novel, Wife, is a splendid study of an Indian girl's introduction to marriage and to life in the USA. Dimple Das Gupta, the heroine, marries a fellow Bengali, Amit Basi; then they leave India for New York, where Amit succeeds in finding work as an engineer. The first part of the novel, set entirely in India, accurately reproduces typical Indian attitudes to marriage, money, education, emigration, and everything in which Dimple and Amit are involved. This reproduction of Indian society is utterly convincing in areas dealing specifically with the affairs of women, for example, the concerns of the mother-in-law (Amit's mother), the friendship of marriageable girls (Dimple and Pixie), and the gripping but rather frightening account of a self-inflicted abortion by the heroine.

The American sections of the novel, beginning with the arrival of Dimple and Amit in New York, take up the major part of the action and are concerned both with the adaptation of Indian immigrants to the USA and with the strains of early marriage as reported from a wife's point of view. To some extent this dual concern divides the interest of the action and draws some of our sympathy away from the deteriorating relationship between Dimple and Amit. Thus there is an element of anti-climax at the end after Dimple has committed adultery, and her mind becomes increasingly overwhelmed by dreams of blood, destruction, and disintegration.

Whatever slight loss of tragic intensity there may be in its dénouement, the novel suffers from no loss in the variety and richness of its social observation. The author reveals as thorough a familiarity with North American speech, attitudes, and popular culture, as she does with similar Indian subjects. In the following passage Dimple and her American lover are alone in her apartment:

> "Of course," Milt answered airily. He pulled her [Dimple] with him into the kitchen and said he would show her how to make a Julia Child special chocolate mousse and began to talk in the panting, breathless voice of the gourmet superstar. He broke four eggs, joking as he worked, and separated the whites and yolks in Marsha's glass bowls, taking care to scoop out flecks of yellow from the bowl of whites along with broken bits of shell. "The tricky part, sweetheart, is to beat the yolks while you dribble the hot syrup in this gook here." And because she seemed to stiffen at the word sweetheart he said with a soft laugh, "I was doing a weak Humphrey Bogart-via-Woody Allen imitation. Okay, sweetheart?"
>
> Dimple giggled after that, giggled as if she were a one-woman audience at a comic movie, and Milt continued in his Bogart voice, alternating with his Woody-Allen-impressing-a-lady-with-a-chocolate mousse for which he ended up dabbing her cheeks with egg yolks and she thought of Archana fingerpainting in nursery school and dabbed Milt

> right back with melted chocolate and butter.
>
> Half an hour later, they sat side by side on the brown sofa with their faces grubby and listened to Kanika Banerjee and Hemanta Kumar records. (P. 170-71)

The passage illustrates the questing credulity of the Indian immigrant and the undiscriminating commonness of her American lover. It requires understanding and technical versatility to render the contact between two cultures so fully and fairly. The novel displays both Indian self-righteousness and American insensitivity, and illustrates the sharp contrast between a narrow, taboo-ridden, Indian mentality and a broader, American openness of mind. But the novel's principal achievement is the inner study which the author provides of Dimple's consciousness, when her heroine is faced with the two problems of cultural adaptation to an alien land and the role of being a good wife. Dimple's mind gives way under the weight of the two problems, and she resorts more and more to the dreams which have always provided her with release from inner tension. Her dreams become more threatening and are themselves a triumph of psychological analysis. Her final dream of stabbing Amit is most effective as a portrayal of marital disintegration; for, although its full meaning is veiled, it is thoroughly consistent with the mysterious mental processes of the repressed heroine who is on the verge of gaining self-expression in a new, more liberating social environment.

Dimple's dreams are an essential part of her character and her life:

> There were too many images of corrosion within the apartment. Noticing them probably signaled the beginning of something bad. There would be other signs if she gave in now. Like telling people her dreams and trying to pass them off as jokes. Then urging people, between nervous giggles, to guess the real meaning of her dreams, until they backed away, apologetic, embarrassed. Then dreaming dreams that they told her were typical. She poured herself a bowl of Wheaties and skim milk and sat down formally at the dining table. She would not discuss her dreams with anyone. (P. 127-28)

This kind of inner probing makes Dimple the most fully explored of the characters in the novel. We see her conventional Hindu upbringing in India and her cautious examination of American culture when she first arrives in New York. Throughout, Dimple's inner life is analysed and presented with sympathy and insight. Her attitudes to pregnancy, for example, are fully convincing, and one feels that the analaysis of her mind just before her abortion could only have come from the pen of a woman. The actual description of the abortion includes a compelling mixture of vague feelings with awareness of concrete reality. The account is compelling because it captures the exact association of inhibiting fear and desperate abandonment which would impel someone in Dimple's situation.

Dimple's portrait as a whole provides the novel with a solid foundation. When her cultural uncertainty in New York and the growing pains of her marriage come to a head with her adultery by the end of the novel, Dimple is well on her way to becoming a liberated, Americanised woman. This dénouement is perhaps less charged with dramatic tension than it might be. But Wife, by and large, is not a novel that presents tragic relationships or scenes which elicit deep emotion. The novel is distinguished by its vivid physical descriptions, its insight into the psychology of women, details of domestic life, and rich social observation.

The next writer, Stephen Gill, is the author of three novels, Why? (1976), Immigrant (1978), and The Loyalist City (1979). He has written nearly a dozen volumes of poems, literary criticism, and travel writing, in addition to his novels and short stories. There is even a full-length volume, Stephen Gill and His Works, which offers a critical evaluation of all of Gill's writing. The three novels do not, however, appear serious enough to justify the kind of analysis and discussion attempted here.

The second novel, Immigrant, is typical, and its literary qualities are the same as in the other two novels. The subject is potentially serious, dealing with racial discrimination and other problems faced particularly by South Asian immigrants to Canada. The hero, Reghu Nath, is an Indian immigrant who is rebuffed time and time again, despite his earnest and genuine efforts to become a responsible member of Canadian society. As a university graduate, Reghu does not lack qualifications, yet his applications never succeed. This subject of immigrants in Canada is important because of the official policy of a national mosaic which is intended to incorporate different cultural groups in free and equal association. Immigrant deals with some of the strains and difficulties involved in the practical working of a multicultural society. One would expect the novel to illuminate these difficulties or to examine either the merits or weaknesses of a cultural mosaic. At least one would expect some sympathy to be aroused for those who, like Reghu, suffer discrimination and injustice. But Immigrant does little more than report facts which the reader already knows or assert principles which are truthful only in the sense that they are platitudinous.

An example of this is when Reghu applies for a teaching job with the schoolboard in Sherbrooke, Quebec. Board officials acknowledge his application and send him to be interviewed by the principal of a school which had advertised for a teacher:

> After a boring journey of four to five hours when Reghu arrived, he didn't see anyone around to give him a ride. Presuming that the teacher who was supposed to take him to the school might be in class and consequently a bit late, Reghu went to a nearby restaurant for a snack while waiting. After twenty minutes had passed, he began to worry. He went to the pay-phone and talked to the principal. After another twenty minutes a teacher came. Within five minutes he was at the school and three minutes later he was dismissed, the principal making it clear that he was looking for a teacher who could speak French.
>
> Reghu told the principal that the advertisement did not state the position was for a bilingual teacher. Besides, he was not informed of it when he made his call from Montreal. Even the persons at the school board did not mention it when he was interviewed in Sherbrooke In addition to all that, the school itself was not bilingual. It was not fair to make an applicant travel a hundred miles only to tell him they can't hire him because he doesn't speak French. But the principal was not in a mood to hear this story. (P. 45-46)

Reghu's response to frustration is to get drunk. The price of the whisky is given and the amount of soda he mixes with it. Almost each sip he takes is described in detail. The triviality of these details and the predictability pf Reghu's response to frustration destroy whatever sympathy the reader is inclined to feel for him. His reactions are too automatic and mechanical and general to convey the grief, pain, rage, or frustration of one particular individual in one specific situation.

Better examples of Gill's generalised and sterilising technique may be seen in passages of dialogue. In the following passage Reghu is observed at a dance:

> One of the girls with whom Reghu enjoyed dancing was Maple, a divorcee in her thirties. She held the position of administrative secretary at a local college, and visited the International League occasionally. Both soon began recognizing each other.
>
> One Saturday, while sitting round a table after the dance, Reghu asked Maple something very personal. Puffing her cigarette, she said, "We have to know each other first."
>
> Reghu was sick of hearing these words. Suddenly he became more alert and asked, "How can you know me?"
>
> "By going out ..."
>
> "How long?"
>
> "I don't know ... Maybe one year; maybe two years
>
> "This long journey can be shortened."
>
> "I don't get your point."
>
> "Ask me questions. I'll be honest and you will know me."
>
> "That is not the way to know tastes and habits of each other."
>
> "Believe me, even after a year or two you will not be able to understand me as well as I do myself. There is every possibility of our being misunderstood. I'd prefer the questions to following that long windy path."
>
> "It doesn't work that way. A woman has to be emotionally involved with a man before she gives herself to him," Maple persisted.
>
> "How does a woman become emotionally involved?"
>
> "By knowing him." She answered placidly. (P. 20-21)

The characters are not sufficiently differentiated. They articulate thoughts which, although opposed, seem to come from one consciousness, as if the author were dramatising a long meditation of his own. The level, unvarying emotional tone of the conversation reinforces this impression, despite the author's comments which attribute emotion to speech that belies it. Maple seems quite unmoved when asserting her platitudes about women and love.

It may seem unfair to a writer as prolific as Gill to dismiss his three novels as largely dramatised monologues, relaying the author's own platitudinous reflections rather than the thoughts and ideas of characters with an independent life of their own. Certainly Gill's energy and initiative are to be admired, and it is possible that his non-fiction writing is more successful insofar as it does not require the creation of characters or the invention of imagined situations. Gill's first novel, Why?, for example, proves to be more interesting as a travelogue than as a work of fiction. It tells the story of Ruben Motard who leaves Canada to work as a school teacher in Ethiopia. But the reader is less interested in Ruben's thoughts and his sexual liaisons, than in his travels in Ethiopia. Ruben's thoughts are banal and unoriginal for the most part, and his sexual activities are mechanical and even crude or vulgar, as in his relationship with the Ethiopian woman, Lete. The novel comes most to life when the author describes Ethiopia. The factual comments on the Eritrean war, for example, are more convincing than the imaginary situations and relationships. When the author hints that the Eritrean cause may be unjustified, he engages the reader's attention in a way that his accounts of racial discrimination and sexual indulgence never do.

If Gill's technique is wanting, the final novelist to be considered, Réshard Gool, goes to the other extreme: his technique is altogether too dazzling, complicated certainly, if not obstructive. Gool's first novel, Price (1973), deals with apartheid as it existed in South Africa in the 1930s and 1940s. The narrator, Adrian van der Merve, is one of the characters who relates the events from a point of view that is not at all clear. As his name suggests, van der Merve is an Afrikaner, and it is through his association with Henry Naidoo, an Indian lawyer, that he gains access to the events and relationships which he reports in his novel. The action itself is episodic, and, even if it does not follow a clear outline, it produces individual episodes which stand out clearly and vividly, as, for example, the romantic affair between Naidoo and Katherine in Chapter Six and the death of the starving African in Chapter Seven. The latter incident is especially moving and confirms the sympathy of the author for the victims of apartheid. This sympathy is supported by a wealth of details concerning South African history, society, and politics, and a thorough familiarity with all matters relating to apartheid and South Africa.

Although the hero of the novel is Henry Naidoo, perhaps the most interesting character is Shaikh Moosa, a racketeer, whose corrupt financial dealings bring him great wealth and power in South Africa. Shaikk Moosa is cunning and unscrupulous, but he represents an essential element of the confused South African world of imperialists, racists, Marxists, and mere opprtunists. The novel is frankly unsentimental in rendering the brutality of the whites, the in-fighting among non-white groups, and the corruption of individuals in all groups. The following passage describes Shaikh Moosa's part in an incident, when he and two associates, along with a Batwa guide, having recovered some treasure from a sunken Portuguese ship, try to make their way back home:

> The year was 1909, the year of the South Africa Act, seven years after the Treaty of Vereeniging. Food was scarce. The nearest settlement was fifteen days inland. Supplies gradually diminished. By day, there were sand blizzards; by night, the cold precluded sleep. By the ninth day they had eaten three mules; only one remained. There was bound to be a herd of zebra in the vicinity. Shaikh-Moosa proposed a hunt. The three men set out, leaving the guide with the last mule. That evening only Shaikh-Moosa returned. The others, the Great Man claimed, were lost; but the guide - "clever chap he was" - knew better. He saw that the meat brought back was not zebra and, in a panic, fled camp.
>
> Shaikh-Moosa, therefore, had to bring in his treasure single-handed - "nothing South Africa let me do, so I did what I could do!" - but when he reached Cape Town a wealthy man, fresh disaster assailled. He discovered that his wife - for whom he had set out on the long odyssey -

> had become the kept woman of several businessmen. His response - he smiled saturninely - was adroit. He put her in charge of the chain of brothels on which his subsequent wealth was founded. (P. 174)

The non-moral brutishness exemplified in this passage, reproduces the complex struggle for survival that Gool sees in South Africa during the 1930s and 1940s. No group is untainted, except perhaps the blacks who form the silent majority in the background. It is something of a feat to maintain objectivity in the face of this type of human conduct that is not only utterly repugnant, but also widely prevalent. Perhaps this is why the author employs a narrator who is insulated from direct contact with the chief character and events: it enables him to achieve a degree of objectivity that would have been impossible, if the narrator were reacting to events in which he himself were directly involved.

This account of Price may be too brief for a novel so full of varied details and unsentimental insights into human depravity. But, as one reviwer confesses: "the story kept slipping away"[25]. The structure of the novel and its use of lengthy recollections and diary entries work against coherent story-telling.

Gool's second novel is The Nemesis Casket (1979), the framework for which is the narrator/author, Ved Devajee (a pseudonym for Gool) and his live-in wife Diane, trying to sort out a vast amount of material that has fallen into their hands in the form of tapes, diaries, notebooks, letters, etc. As one reads through the pages - rather, hops, skips, and jumps around them, as one is forced to - what emerges is a social comment on the North American, in particular Canadian, military-industrial-commercial complex and its sexual mores. The names of the characters are highly symbolic here: Vestinghaus, the scientist, born in Germany and imported to North America after the war; Marshall Field, the war veteran; Leasingham, who has sold his humanity to technology; Price, the small businessman; the Gardhouses, who guard the old traditions of Canada; Goodlipp, the preacher - to name a few. We find in the novel unfaithful husbands and wives, sexual relations between professors and students and across generations. Gool makes good use of his vast experience of living in three countries (the UK, South Africa, and Canada) and an erudition that cuts across disciplines and societal dimensions - politics, social behaviour, history, philosophy, Marxism, literature, music, and so on. The message that the writer gives, and indeed the insights gained into Canadian society, are not insignificant to Canadians.

The novel is hardly "unoriginal" (p. 69), as Gool claims it to be in an "Afterword" - part of the novel. For example, every chapter title is the name of a character, and through the development of the given character we gain an insight into both that character and others with whom s/he interacts. Original as the technique may be, it may be the use of such a technique that forces the author to succumb to the compulsive, almost sadistic (or "perverse," as Jamaiscui, a francophone is characterised [p. 95]) temptation to confuse the reader. (Or did the technique and the compulsiveness emerge in the same process?) For what he does is release bits and pieces of information in no particular order and with no apparent logic. Indeed, as from the tapes (in the chapter entitled "Dustin"): "one gleans at times an impression of a universe without masks: fragments of sense randomly pasted together - thoughts of a madman. Scenes are sometimes coherent, sometimes not; more often than not, they are as unrelated to one another as people living in an urban apartment block, or as columns of a daily newspaper" (p. 69). One could not have summarised the reader's - and the novel's - problem better. "To be rigorous, the novel is a collage" (p. 298). It is as if, "like Hegel, he was making doubly sure no one could possibly understand him" (p. 95).

The last lines of Chapter One, entitled "Marshall," are an example:

> My notebook again: stray facts
>
> Christopher lent me his studio when I returned after Christmas from Mexico
>
> Faith talked non-stop four hours.
>
> Jacqueline Leasingham explained why she stopped coming for tutorials.
>
> Visit from the R.C.M.P. - the casket? I have a feeling now that I am

under surveillance.
Dustin: how will it end. (P. 32-33)

This is the first time in the book that Christopher is mentioned, and one wonders why Faith talked non-stop for four hours. Why Jacqueline stopped coming to tutorials may only be guessed at: is it because she heard about Marshall's sexual exploits? Tension is built through the introduction of the RCMP. But how does Dustin, Marshall's son, come into the picture. Certainly, these questions - or rather, most of them - can be figured out - eventually. But only eventually and with great strain on the part of the reader.

To give another example of this kind of confusion, here is Dustin arriving at Christopher's apartment on Spadina (in Toronto): "He was not welcome. My dissertation was in its final stages, and his father's frequent, soul-draining visits had not helped its progress, It was clear, however, after a while, that he did not want to talk, only to sleep, so I opened the spare bed ..." (p. 79). Does the narrator share the room with Christopher? If the apartment is introduced as "Christopher's apartment, why would the narrator ("I") open the door? What is the connection with Dustin's father's frequent visits to him, and why are these soul-draining? To be sure, once again, the answers to all of these questions may be somewhere in the 300-odd-page novel, but finding them becomes the preoccupation of the reader, in the course of which the emotional involvement of even the most disciplined and the deeply committed drains away. It could, of course, be argued that the search itself is the aesthetic experience, but not when there is nothing left in the process to give.

The examples above are representative of the entire work. "One keeps missing," as the reviewer (quoted above) of Gool's Price says, the meaning, the sense, the story. Deciphering it all is hard work, even though the real force of the burden of it may not be felt from isolated excerpts such as these given here.

To carry confusion to its extreme, Gool adds in an Appendix I - the Afterword - signed by Gool himself, in his capacity as editor of Square Deal Publications, the book's real publisher (owned by Gool), that the manuscript, as sent by Devjee (the author's pseudonym), is "incomprehensible." If that is not enough, the book ends with Appendix III, which includes some pictures, supposedly of the characters of the novel. In order not to leave the reader in peace until the very last word, the back cover carries a picture, purporting to be of Devjee in military uniform!

Literature, indeed all art, is communication of the senses. It must excite, in our case the reader, emotionally - pleasurably, grotesquely, sensually, etc. (Indian aesthetics list nine such values). But, if the reader has to wade through the text many times over, simply to understand what the author is trying to get across, and/or the interrelationship of the characters, the reader can contribute little to the ongoing sense-related experience, given that the affirmation of a piece of literature is a function of what the reader brings to it. The author successfully obstructs the reader's involvement, and one can even sense the writer chuckling at his achievement! He takes away from the reader the ordinary experience of reading. The redundancy built into natural language (speaking of reading), where the same information is given through different channels - sound, meaning, context, information, predictability - allows one to skim or scan without loss of meaning. Not with Gool. He demands that we read every single line and word; for otherwise we are likely to miss a crucial word or two, a name, a hint, that has been surreptiously introduced into the text. In the paragraph quoted above regarding Dustin's arriving at Christopher's apartment (almost any other paragraph would do), it is easy for the reader to miss the word "My" in the second line. If Dustin goes to Christopher's apartment, one would expect the development of the sequence to relate to Christopher and not to the narrator!

This is, of course, not to say that Gool's use of language is poor. On the contrary, he is extremely economical, using a minimum of words for maximum information, and he displays a rare flexibility in switching registers, from standard English to colloquial, from teenage language to southern American to erudite and scholarly (and judging from a recent reading at York University in Toronto, from dialect to dialect). Some examples:

> Hey, hey wha's going on?
> Who you?

> *Me?*
> *That's what I said, buddy boy. Who you?*
> ...
> *Where you from, Roland?*
> *Nearabouts Kitchener*
> *No kidding*
> *Sure as hell*
> *Son of a gun. Near Kitchener, huh?*
> *You bet* (P. 164)

We can almost see two guys engaged in casual conversation. The following examples show language shift from standard English to teenage language:

> The reason for the camping expedition, for example. No reason, really: just simply, in his own words, *Toronto began to turn me off: we* [Justin and Jalline] *goofed around the pad one or two days, then we bought this really groovy car, you know, like with all the flowers painted on it, and we took off, and it was like wow, we were really digging Canada, and man, it was far-out, and when we cut into Quebec, we nearly flipped*. (P. 70)

In another style, Miss April declares: "I wid na think it rained once the time of day he came. Lord's truth: no as far back as my weak memory takes heed" (p. 88). Or, in a letter to Harvey, his buddy, Dustin writes: "Knowst thou how with what high fluttering pulse I pine for thee?" To which Harvey simply answers: "Dustin, you fat slimy cross-eyed turnip" (p. 71). On occasion, he uses other languages as well, French and even Irish. Gool's powerful language usage can be seen in his extensive use of similes, metaphors, double entendres, symbolisms, etc.

The Nemesis Casket is an intriguing work, a good experimental work, which one reviewer calls "the most brilliant example so far of Twentieth Century Canadian Baroque" in the style of the works of Hubert Aquin, Rejean Ducharme and Leonard Cohen[26] The work is certainly a good intellectual exercise. One would even be willing to congratulate Gool on making a significant contribution to the progress of human civilisation by forcing an extension of man's brain capacity for making connections, particularly in the wake of an information explosion and the current context of specialisation, of knowing more and more about less and less. In conclusion, The Nemesis Casket is not an "immigrant novel," with all the connotations of amateurism, but rather the work of an immigrant writer of great maturity and creativity.

Altogether, the novelists considered in this chapter wear their South Asian label rather uncomfortably. Their novels contain little evidence of common subjects or themes specifically related to the region of South Asia. The label is justified by the fact that their immediate forebears came from the South Asian region. Their subjects vary from the reproduction of Indian peasant life in Trinidad, the escapades of Indian students in Britain, and the problems of Indian immigrants in North America, to the fate of Asians under apartheid in South Africa. The techniques employed vary from evocation of picturesque local colour to satirical wit, irony, and rather obscure experimental writing. The artistic achievement is mixed in quality, varying from the very modest efforts of Stephen Gill to the promising novels of Harold Sonny Ladoo and Bharati Mukherjee and the highly experimental work of Réshard Gool.

CHAPTER FIVE

Punjabi Literature in Canada

Surjeet Kalsey

1. Poetry

In Canada, Punjabi poetry began with the arrival of some Punjabi freedom fighters of the Indian Independence Movement around the end of the nineteenth century. They were so full of a sharp political sense of national unity and awareness of freedom, that they started writing revolutionary poems in order to awaken the East Indian community for the independence of their motherland. Among such patriots, Gyani Bhagwan Singh, Sardar Munsha Singh Dukhi, Baba Narinjan Singh Pandori (Hind Sewak), Baba Gurdev Singh Dillon (Yakdum), Hassan Rahim (editor of Hindustani), and Dr. Sunder Singh (editor of Sansar) were active in journalism and in the literary field. They were committed to the Independence Movement and worked day and night for it. They wrote revolutionay poems and published them mainly in The Hindustani Gadar, a newspaper published from San Francisco and distributed throughout North America.

It is this long tradition that the considerable number of educated Punjabis with literary consciousness, who have immigrated to Canada during the past decade and a half, have continued in the field of contemporary Punjabi Canadian poetry. Some of them were already known as writers in Punjab. Bharati Navtej, Chamman Kashmira Singh, Dhanjal Surinder Pal Singh, Gill Moranwali, Gill Tarlochan Singh, Rahi Gurmel Singh (now Gurumel), Rampuri Gurchuran Iqbal Ramuwalia, Ravinder Ravi, Shamsher Kartar Singh, and Sukhinder, to name but a few, had published one of more of their books of poetry before they left for Canada. Some other poets, such as Badhni Bachittar, Bal Rajinder Kaur, Darshan Gill, Grewal Mota Singh, Giani Kesar Singh, Kanwal Gurdial Singh, and Surjeet Kalsey, had also published some of their works in the literary magazines and newspapers published in Punjab. All but three of these poets have continued to write after coming to Canada.

In addition, there is a large number of Punjabi poets who have taken to writing and publishing after coming to Canada. Among them are: Bhagi Narinder, Bhamipuri Tej, Bhangu Jaswinder, Bhinder Latt, Bol Sarban, Bukkan, Chahal Amarjit, Cheem Jaswinder Kaur, Chehera Harbhajan Singh, Chhinna Gurmeet, Chhinaa Santokh, Chimma Baldev, Chohan Raj, Dhaliwal Bhupinder, Dhaliwal Kuldeep, Dhalla Kulwant Singh, Dhanwant Karam Singh, Dhillon Bakhshish Singh, Dhillon Ram Singh, Dosanjh Ujjal, Flora Sukhdev, Gill Avtar Singh, Gill Baljit Singh, Gill G.S., Gill Harbinder, Gill Manjit, Gill Mohan Singh, Gill Paramjit, Ghuman Paramjit, Gurum Jasbir, Hardev, Haripal, Harminder, Hundal Sukhwant, Jatana Jagdave, Jatana Surdave, Jatanvi Lakbir, Jeet Inderjeet Singh, Judge Maha Singh, Kalsi Baldev Singh, Kanwal Gurdial Singh, Khera Iqbal, Kingra Ranjit, Mann Amarjit, Mann Karnal, Mann Sohan Singh, Palahi Amrik Singh, Pawar Harbhajan, Purba Nachhatar Singh, Kakhra Udham, Rai Major, Rampuri Jeewan, Rana Harjinder, Rasha Mittar, Rode Ajmer, Sadhu, Safri Romesh, Sandhu Bakhtawar Singh, Sandhu Tej, Sandhu Jagjeewan, Sandhu Nonihal, Sidu Balraj, Sidhu Balwinder Singh, Sidu Charanjit Singh, Sihota Kulwant Singh, Singh Jarnail Chandi, Singh Kishan, Soomel Mohinder, Sufi Amarjit, Taqdeer Jaswant Kaur, Toor Daljit, and Warraich Hardev.

Thus there are approximately seventy-five Punjabi poets who have published poems in local literary magazines or in the literary pages of newspapers in Canada, such as The Watno Dur and the Ranjit in Vancouver, Asia Times and The Perdesi Punjab (bi-weekly) in Toronto, The Indo-Canadian Times (weekly) in Surry, BC, and the now defunct Jeewan Sanjhan, Nawin Dharti, and The Parivartan, all in Vancouver. Twenty-seven poets have also published their works in an anthology: Canada Di Punjabi Kavita (Punjabi poetry of Canada), published in 1980 by the Punjabi Literary Association of Vancouver.

In view of the limitations of space, we will deal with only some of the more significant and frequently published poets, who have published one or more books while residing in Canada. In evaluating this Canadian Punjabi poetry, the following aspects will be discussed:

1. Themes
2. Structure
3. Imagery and symbols.

Themes

Punjabi poetry may be grouped under four broad categories:

1. Poems with Canadian content
2. Poems with both Canadian and Punjabi content
3. Poems with Punjabi content/past memories
4. Subjective Romanticism.

However, it sometimes is hard to draw a strict line between those poets whose writings have Canadian content and those whose writings have Indian/Punjabi content. It is natural that a change in environment always touches the human heart. How could these poets, who have come across the oceans, avoid this touch? Therefore, every poet under consideration has written something about Canadian life, including poets such as Gill Moranwali and Kashmira Singh Chamman, who always prefer to write songs about their beloved.

Canadian content

There are several poems written by Punjabi poets in the context of Canadian life. Different writers depict different aspects of this life. They touch all types of topics from farm workers to cabaret dancers. The Canadian content can be further divided into three sub-categories:

a) Poems that depict the common man's life in Canada, as for instance, the following: "Pardesi Bhartian De Nan" (Addressed to foreigner Indians) by Chasman Kashmira Singh, "Khet Mazdoor Di Pukaar" (A call from a farmworker) by Grewal Mota Singh, "Aasin Parwasi Panchi" (We, the migratory birds) and "Hafta Aant" (The weekend) by Surjeet Kalsey, "Watno Dur" (Far from our country" by Palahi Amrik, "Aasin" (We) by Rampuri Gurcharan, "Sawarg Ch Kaid" (Imprisoned in heaven) by Rasha Mittar, "Mera Khudkushi Da Irada Nahin" (I don't intend to commit suicide) by Ravi Ravinder, "Canada" and "Mrs. Smith of Vancouver" by Ajmer Rode, "Badla" (Revenge) and "Seena Paatan Di Gal" (The heart-breaking incident) by Sadhu, "Loh Aashak" (Robot) by Singh Jarnail, "Saputnik Yug Da Jadugar" (Magician of the space age), "Eh Pachham Hai" (This is the West), and "Darshak" (Spectator) by Sukhinder.

b) Poems that depict Canadian life in pubs and clubs, where the intelligentsia talk about planets, the space age, rockets, wine, women, or crime. Among them: "Boredom," "Akke Hoe" (Weary people), and "Jal Bharam Jal" (Water and mirage) by Ravi Ravinder, "Go-go Dancer" by Ajmer Rode, "Hipi Piri" (by Sidhu Gurumel, "Subway Train" and "Eh Pachham Hai (This is the West) by Sukhinder.

c) Poems that represent Canadian life and racial discrimination. For example: Gurchuran Rampuri's poem "Lahu Di Sanjh" (The relationship of blood), Sadhu's "Jawab" (Answer), "Badla" (Revenge), and "Seena Paatan Di Gal" (The heart-breaking incident), and Ajmer Rode's "Labels."

Thus Canadian Punjabi poetry, in general, deals with various Canadian themes. Every writer chooses a different theme. Some poems, for example, depict Western materialistic society as a machine, and whoever comes to stay in such a society eventually becomes a robot or machine himself/herself. Sukhinder's poem "Eh Pachham Hai" is an example of this theme:

This is the West

We
like machines
ring like alarm clocks;
Our brains direct orders
like signals from the computer:
Start. Stop.
Turn left. Turn right.
Mortgages on our houses
Hydro bills
Long list of groceries
and Westernized our brains
our wives, our children

our limbs speak
ring---K-e-r-r-r-k-e-r-r-r
like machines. (LDM)

Here is another, by Ajmer Rode (from "America"):

Ol small and large parts of flesh Ol every part moves
from back and forth in some rule Ol if some part does
not fit at one place Ol the owners change its place
Ol the parts - foolish parts think they are free to do
anything they want Ol and they keep on moving speedily
Ol Ol Ol Ol Ol Ol Ol Ol Ol Ol Ol Ol Ol Ol.

There are also themes of the weary, boring, and monotonous life of the materialistic world, such as Ajmer Rode's poem "Mrs. Smith of Vancouver."

There are certain poems which depict the themes of the Space Age, and the fall of man as a result of drugs, LSD, and pollution, etc. For instance:

The problem has not to do with Africa, nor
Asia nor Europe
But with man
who sitting in the furnace of the Atom
moulds his dreams. (Ravi Ravinder While passing
through the bazar...)

Other poems show how the East Indians come to Canada to earn money and to support their relatives back in India, and how poverty drives them towards Western countries. Surjeet Kalsey's "Siddhartha Does Penance Again" is an example of this:

I a Siddhartha
nailing a journey to my feet
once again
...
denying my emotions and feelings

(my hungry body does not need for the time being
'spiritual enlightenment')
I've begun to search for
the other salvation this time
...
I've found the path to salvation from hunger
Now I've transmigrated from Siddharatha to 'Enlightened Buddha'
(an artist within me has died
I've become one of the dumbly driven cattle) (CLT 26 (1977), 33-34)

We can also find isolated examples of themes relating to historical events or incidents, such as Sadhu's poem "The Heart-Breaking Incident." The poem deals with the well known Komagata Maru incident of 1914, when over three hundred Sikhs came to Canada in the ship of that name and were not allowed to land: "At the same shore of the ocean - / where once came the Komagata Maru / ..." - this poem is discussed in detail below.

Poems with both Canadian and Punjabi content

The following are poems that touch on both Canada and the Punjab: "Man The Chithi" (A letter from mother) by Badhni Bachitar, "Aaj Di Dak" (Today's mail) by Bhinder Latt, "Kis Di Gal Karde Ho" (Whom you talk about) and "Ik Sawer Ayegi" (A morning will rise) by Bol Sarban, "Samjhota" (A compromise) by Cheema Baldev, "Khaleej" (The bay) by Gill Darshan, "Mangetar Nun" (To my fiance) by Hundal Sukhwant, "Aasamrath" (Helpless), "Manez Gal Khatar" (Only for the sake of talking), and "Phir Turia Siddhartha" (Siddhartha does penance once again) by Surjeet Kalsey, "Es Ton Pahlan" (Before it happens) by Ramuwalia Iqbal, "Banbas" (Exile) by Rasha Mittar, "Donon Budhu" (Both are fools) and Guru Te Sikh (Blue horse) by Ajmer Rode, "Ghorian Di Suwari (Riding the horses) and "Katal Ton Baad" (After murder) by Sukhinder, "Man Des Tan Pardes" (My mind is in my country, my body is in the foreign country) by Sandhu Jagjeewan, "Khabran" (The news) and Ik Khat" (A letter) by Sadhu.

Iqbal Ramuwalia's poem "Es Ton Pahlan" (Before it happens) is one of the outstanding examples of this type and is discussed in detail below. There are some other poems which deal with feelings of nostalgia and homesickness. From their recollections these poets arrange a convenient affinity between the two cultures, or a comparison between the hard life on the farms and the easy life of the landlords or vice versa. The past life of poverty they have left behind, but they have imprisoned themselves in "Heaven," where every luxury is within their reach but not the open atmosphere or compassion among people. Mota Singh Grewal's poem "Khet Mazdoor Nu" (To the farm worker) and Mittar Rasha's poem "Imprisoned in Heaven" are reflective of this:

> A cage of gold
> bird-feed of silver
> to have wings
> but not to fly
> life is a long lamentation! (Murmurs

Poems with Punjabi content - past memories

Many Punjabi poets who came during the 1970s brought with them the impact of the latest literary movement in Punjabi literature, i.e., the Revolutionary Movement that began in the late sixties and was at its peak in the early seventies. Most of the poetry written under this movement supported the Nacelite Movement. The poetry was a direct attack on the existing social and political values or a condemnation of inhumanity and war. Under this category we can list the following poems: "Deewain Di Lo" (The light of the lamps) by Bhinder Latt, "Natak" (The drama) by Chimman Baldev, "Kalam Te Talwar" (Pen and sword) and Aarthan Di Bhal" (Search for meanings) by Dhanjal, "Mazdoor Nun" (To the labourer) by Dhaliwal Kuldeep, "Siasi Masla" (A political matter) and "Leader" by Dosanjh Ujjal, "Bagi Kavi" (A revolutionary poet), "Jhnan De Nan" (To the Jhnan, the river), "Pisna Ik Pap Hai" (Being exploited is a sin), and "Dharti De Aasin Put" (We are sons of the earth) by Gyani Kesar Singh, "Iko Hashar" (The same result), "Insaniat Mit Nahin Sakdi" (Humanity cannot be effaced) by Surjeet Kalsey, "Din Raat" (Day and night) and "Khat De Juwab Vich" (Reply to the letter) by Mann Karnail, "Corea" (Korea), "Bol" (Words), "Massacre," and "Mukti" by Rampuri Gurcharan, "Zanzeeran" (The shackles) and

"Zindgi Di Talash" (The search for life) by Rana Harjinder, "Kavita-1" (Poem-1), "Khandit Bimb" (The distorted image), "Sutantrata" (Independence) by Ajmer Rode, "Shahid Da But" (A statue of a martyr) and "Moge The Shahid" (Martyrs of the Moga) by Soomel Mohinder, "Aasin Manukh Howan Ge" (We must be humans) and "Gandhi Ji (Mr Gandhi) by Sufi Amarjit, "Shaheed Da But" (A statue of a martyr) and "Antar" (The difference) by Warraich Hardev.

Poems such as the above are full of social and political realities, with a touch of Marxism. Some of them are purely homages to the martyrs of the Indian Independence Movement. Some of the poems touch on the struggle against social inequality, injustice, and poverty. Surinder Dhanjal's poem, "Search for Meanings," is one of these:

Search for Meanings

Until today I've plowed grief
and sowed toil in my fields
only hunger has grown out of them
Now like a 'fateful person'
I'll sow guns in my fields
Then the lava will burst out
and the age-old hunger will be burnt out.

On the palms of the frozen nights of December
I'll put
some burning red sparks
then out of death
I'll search for life's meanings.

The mountains may be
higher then the Himalayas
there's no end of adzes
nor can these hands fall apart,
and on this earth
Furhads[28] live through ages!   (CLT 26 (1977), 31)

Romanticism / subjective idealism

Among the Canadian Punjabi poets, there are eighteen to twenty, whose writings represent Romantic or subjective individualistic elements. Romanticism was prevalent in Punjabi poetry almost fifty years ago, when long narrative love poems were being written in rhyming schemes. Among the poets under consideration, almost all of the poems (except some isolated examples of blank verse) of Kashmira Singh Chamman, Gill Moranwali, Bachitar Badhni, and Mota Singh Grewal are in rhyme, and most of these are about love for the beloved, waiting, pain of separation, and longing for reunion.

Most of Darshan Gill's poems depict all these Romantic elements but in blank verse. Dejection, sorrow, and pessimism are the main undercurrents in his poems, although there are philosophical touches here and there. Gill's poem "Khalij" (The bay) is an example:

I stuck glass shards
on four walls of my house
I was scared of
the thief from the outside

The thief was invisible
everyday he broke
into my existence

I thought
With the glass shards
on the walls
Keeping within me
the truth of my life's deeds
I could sleep without worry.

It seems:
Some invisible hand -

hanging me upside down
holding me by the finger
making me walk on the glass shards -
leads me out.

Between the two extremes -
In and Out
my torn existence
is becoming a bay.   (Khalij)

Other poems of this type are: "Ik Pal Ik Ehsas" (One moment, one feeling) and "Ik Sawal" (One question) by Bhagi Narinder, "Haukian De Beej" (The seeds of sighs) and the romantic Gazals and songs by Chamman Kashmira Singh, "Aale Fut" (Wounds) and "Vichhora" (Separation) by Chehera Harbhajan, "Kavita" (A poem) by Chimma Baldev, "Aadhura Khat" (Unfinished letter) and "Do Khayal" (Two thoughts) by Chhinna Gurmeet, "Main Teri Heer Han" (I am your Heer)[29] by Gill Harbinder, "Kooknoos" (Phoenix) by Haripal, "Aarthi" (Coffin) by Judge Maha Singh, "Anbhol" (Innocent) by Jatanvi Lakhbir, "Parchhain" (The shadow), "Kudrat" (Nature), and "Kavita ...?" (Poem ...?) by Kaur Harminder, "Galan" (Talkings) by Rakhra Udham, "Geet" (A song) by Rampuri Jeewan, "Birhon Saed" (A call from dejection) and "Kad Tak" (How long?).

Other themes

Finally, there are some themes which go beyond national and cultural barriers, such as "Triangle" by Ajmer Rode and "Silence" by Rampuri Gurcharan. Here are some excerpts:

When under my skull
the ticker-tape chatters away,
when I can only walk
on the cart tracks,
when like a parrot I can speak
only the sentences I have been taught,

I do not live
or half-live
and only pretend to live
...
when stripping off all my shame
I, a skeleton, sit by the roadside
searching for the stolen shreds
in garbage cans,
I do not even exist.
only half-exist
or struggle to exist.
Yes, it's me:
the human being
searching for his habitat
on the triangle of
Life
Existence
Half-existence. (CLT 26 (1977), 30)

Rampuri views man living in a chaos of machines, wars, and confusion - for instance:

Where is silence?
Where is silence? (nowhere)
Minds, machines and people cry out
Existence is a war, a hustle-bustle
a shouting barter's market -
Who pays heed to the other?

The earth is embedded with explosions
and the sky is full of debris
The politician wrangles,
the rishi hawks the spirit,
they both sell a recipe for tranquility

while they quarrel over names.
...
In the word of sword, savagery, blood and war,
in the cries for mercy of the wounded
the present is dangerous, the future a silhouette,
the whole of life is a chaos.
Where is silence, solitude, and tranquility? (TSAR 2:1, 55)

Similarly, there are themes which deal primarily with the status of women in a man's world, regardless of any country or culture. For example, Surjeet Kalsey's many poems deal with the feelings and problems of the woman's world. "She and He," "A Distance," "An Oasis," "A Rib of Adam," and "She: Without Face" all portray the woman's status in a man's world. As an example, here are a few lines from the poem "She: Without Face":

Eve was born with her face on her body
In the swamp of time
woman lost her face ...

Without face, she kept on searching for
her identity her head her face.

... and she has found
her face her head her identity.

What a surprise!
This is not the age of faces
the masculine-thought still
speaks the body-language. (SW, p. 21)

Structure

Most of the Canadian Punjabi poems are written in blank verse. Yet they leave a lingering effect of a particular mood. Sometimes it is the mood of the poem that creates its rhythm. For instance, Gurchuran Rampuri's poem "Neend" (Sleep) gives an effect of a serene rhythm:

Sleep

Talking about sleep is
like talking about a girl
who, when called, doesn't come
and when not sought after
covers both eyes with her soft palms.
When sleep comes, it dips
the heart in the world of dreams
but when it comes and immediately departs
it leaves in the body the sharp shards of
untruth and truth
and we cannot even rub our hands. (CLT 26 (1977), 19)

The poem goes smoothly over the abstract process of sleeping, as if the reader were talking to a beautiful girl.

Recently, a young poet, Ajmer Rode, has introduced what may be called a concrete form of poetry into Punjabi. The term "structure" is used here to define not only the form of the verse and the formal arrangement, but also the sequences of images and ideas which unite to convey the meaning of the poem, as for instance, in "Guru Te Sikh" (Blue horse):

Blue Horse

Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom inside, came guru on Punjab
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom inside, came guru
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom inside, came
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom inside ...
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom?
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of?
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean...

Blue horse dances underneath.
Blue horse dances.
Blue horse. (MPP, p. 124)

In this poem the poet builds a diminishing effect by deleting the final word from each line in succession. The guru is the tenth guru, Gobind Singh, of the Sikhs. He was full of wisdom when he became the guru and inspired the Sikhs to be brave and wise. With the disappearance of the guru all these qualities seemed to have disappeared. The receding line endings seek to construct an image of decline.

Gazal is an important and traditional form of Punjabi poetry. In *Gazal*, stanzas are formed with the first and third lines or the second and fourth lines rhyming. Gurchuran Rampuri, Gill Moranwali, and Kashmira Singh Chamman have written several *Gazals*. Though it is a conventional form of poetry, it gives a unity to the structure and the contents. A *Gazal* appears neat, like a sonnet, and creates a certain mood - love, revolt, dejection, patriotism, etc.

Imagery and symbols

Every Punjabi poet chooses his/her own imagery and symbols to reflect his/her thoughts and ideas. Sometimes it is the poet's keen observation of life that provides the imagery; at other times it is his/her knowledge of things, books, mythology, and present or past cultural values. The following provide a few examples.

All the imagery in Sadhu's poem "The Heart-Breaking Incident" is set on the seashore of British Columbia, where the poet recalls the incident:

> At the same shore of the ocean -
> where once came the Komagata Maru
> and went back without kissing the shore sand
> shrieking like a hungry elephant facing the guns -
> Now sitting amidst the scattered boulders
> the driftwood, the gravel, the sand,

I wonder how they witnessed
the scene
and listened to
the voices of our grand fathers.

I try to listen to the music of the waves... (TSAR 2:1, 58)

The shore, the ocean, the scattered boulders, the driftwood, the gravel, the sand - all these things place the poem in the natural setting of the seashore. In the next stanza, the poet personifies the boulder, stones, and gravel. That is why he sits amidst them to talk about the incident: "I ask the walking stones." It also depicts another aspect of the image, i.e., a civilised urban setting. But "laughing people" suggests a social attitude of indifference by the Canadian people towards the incident. By contrasting the attitudes and emotions of the two groups of people, the poet shows that what is "heartbreaking" to one could be "laughter" to another. This is not only a mixture of two histories, ethnic and Canadian, but it is also the effect of the history on perceptions of the present. Although the imagery suggests some political awareness, it is more or less a lamentation of the past memories. Its imagery, brevity, and serenity leaves readers in a state of pathetic fallacy. The emotional as well as the intellectual effects of the various images like "kissing the shore sand," "hungry elephant," and "walking stones" create visual sensations. In fact, through these images the poet expresses his feelings about the injustice.

The following poem by Ravi Ravinder deals with man's disaster in the chaos of this scientific and atomic age and the polluted atmosphere which drives him either to a slow death or to suicide: "But the man / who sitting on the furnace of the atom / moulds his dreams." The images of "furnace" and "mould" create a picture of a working blacksmith who moulds iron, and the poet makes the analogy of modern man as a blacksmith. But modern man moulds only his dreams. Nobody knows when the chaos of this life will devour him. For instance, the imagery in the following poem, "I Don't Intend to Commit Suicide," depicts the poet's ideas about man and death:

Time has stopped
like death in the body
even so people
were running, round and around.

What sort of this calm island is?
where every struggle
drowns in dumb quietude
simplified!

In an atmosphere shackled by conflict -
atomic race, population explosion,
racial prejudice,
and bread-winning, status-seeking -
the craving for struggle does not die
nor the desire for peace.

Sometimes when time
seems to stop in my breath
I crave in my whole
repressed and suffocated self
to open like an opening fist in the wind.

I don't intend to commit suicide
but give me my peace! (MPP, p. 56)

The first two lines create an imagery of death, that extends to the next stanza. It is as if the advancement has stopped and man is confused and "running round and around." Even in such an atmosphere that is shackled by conflict - the atomic race, the population explosion, racial prejudice, the struggle for existence, and status-seeking - "the craving for struggle does not die."

In this chaos and confusion, man's desire for peace also lingers on. Stopping of time in breath, "suffocated self," and the desire of opening himself "like an opening fist in the wind" are the images that suggest that modern man is busy and that rushed life drives him to the threshhold of death, where he begins to think about commiting suicide. "Racial prejudice," "bread-winning," and "status-seeking" are the images that indicate the experiences of the immigrants in a foreign land. The image of a "population explosion" more or less represents the poet's homeland, India. There is an extended imagery in the first two stanzas. Such images in the second stanza as "calm island," "dumb quietness," and "simplified" qualify the death image of the first stanza - Death simplifies everything!

Sukhinder goes a step further with the same idea when he uses the image of "Adiwasi" (A Primitive Man). He points out that modern man is a primitive man and lives in the jungle of the so-called materially advanced world:

> Who has the time
> to stop for a moment in the jungle
> No one's breath is insured
> everybody craves for a drop of water.
> ...
> It doesn't matter if
> the East is red, or the West white
> the bird is still suffocating
> in the shut room. (WD (Nov 1977)

In modern civilisation man feels suffocated. The poet likens all the scientific advancements of civilisation to a thick jungle, in which man seems still "primitive."

Sukhinder's poem "Darshak" (Spectators) is an example of a poem that mixes imagery from both cultures:

> We are spectators.
> There is snow in the room
> and outside.
> ...
> Now we don't feel at home

behind the shut windows
nor do we talk about our hearts
outside.   (TSAR 2:1, 57)

Images such as "snow in the room / and outside" suggest the cold weather of Canada, but the poem has a deeper meaning than just the weather. It implies the warm or cold behaviour of the people. As the poet tells us later, people "don't feel at home" or "feel suffocated", thereby depicting their inner state of mind. The imagery is a good mixture of two cultures.

There are some other poems, too, that present the same idea that new immigrants do not feel at home in their new homeland. Even as they try to correlate many of their new experiences with their background, there are many barriers - they cannot speak about their hearts.

Mixed imagery emerges very strongly from another poem - "Before It Happens," by Iqbal Ramuwalia:

Before It Happens

Before
the kernel of my forehead
stills in the frigid civilization
and I drown to the hairbun
in the quagmire of nude breasts
and learn to guess the faces of the girls
from the lipstick marks on cigarette butts
pare away with the plane of dollars
the restlessness on the lips of my poetry ...
Before I roll down the bundle of my shirts
(torn at the ration depots)
from Qutub Minar big whiskey bottles
and crush the storm of slogans
still fresh in my memory
in the hustle and bustle of clubs
cover the songs of Udassi with smoke

from chimney long cigarettes
erase from my forehead the cracked map of India ...
Before all this happens -
privately, I have to fix
the date of my own commemoration! (TSAR 2:1, 66)

The poet compares the club life in Canada with the life of an immigrant. "Drown to the hairbun" is a vivid image that brings a picture of a young Punjabi man who has just come to a different culture and society. Hardworking young men come from the Punjab to work in the mills or on farms in Canada, and earn good money. But then they "pare away with the plane of dollars" in the glamorous life of the clubs, pubs, and bars. The poet is very conscious about such single men and indirectly gives them a warning to stay away from this life, reminding them of their past and the hard life of poverty: "roll down the bundle of my shirts / (torn at the ration depots)," while waiting several hours for his turn to receive rationed food; or:

from Qutub Minar big whiskey bottles,
and crush the storm of slogans
still fresh in my memory
in the hustle and bustle of clubs.

The "storm of slogans" is a reminder to those who had been fighting against poverty and the existing political setup in their homeland, in order to bring equality to society. The successive images depict the poet's concern about the fall of such young people:

cover the songs of Udassi with smoke
from chimney long cigarettes
erase from my forehead the cracked map of India ...
Before all this happens -
privately, I have to fix
the date of my own commemoration!

The images - "Qutub Minar big whiskey bottles" and "chimney long cigarettes" present visual impressions from the two cultures. "Qutub Minar" is a tall historical building in Delhi, round in shape like a bottle. Similarly, extra long cigarettes may be the speciality of this country, but they remind one of the kiln chmneys and bring the image of labourers working in the dust of kilns and smoking chimneys.

The whole imagery is set in the local atmosphere in the "frigid civilization," with references to Indian culture and society. Images such as "torn at the ration depots," "Qutab Minur big," "storm of slogans," and "cracked map of India" rise up in the memory in contrast to the "Quagmire of nude breasts," "lipstick marks on cigarette butts," plane of dollars," and "the hustle and bustle of clubs." Thus they depict the contrasting emotions and attitudes of the two cultures. The cultural memories help to mix the two ways of living and of social values.

Poets such as Sukhinder, Surjeet Kalsey, Ravi Ravinder, and Mittar Rasha use mythical imagery. For example, Sukhinder's many poems have references to Greek and Indian mythologies. Consider his poem "Katal Ton Baad" (After suicide):

> Today again
> It was perhaps a hysteric fit
> He has chopped his mother's hands
> spitted on the floor with hatred
> Oedipus expelled Jocasta from the room
>
> He cried loudly
> No!
> No!

With a little variation, the poet re-creates the Greek myth of Oedipus the King, who killed his father and married his mother by mistake. In the following stanzas the poet makes reference to the Hindu scriptures:

Moments spent with Radha in the Brindavan
...
and Gopies told Krishna sarcastically
in the presence of Devki
Remember! We are your Gopies. (LDM)

The poet does not exactly compare the two myths, but he tries to build a bridge between Greek and Hindu myth. Devki was Krishna's mother, while Jocasta was Oedipus's mother.

"Siddhartha Does Penance Once Again," by Surjeet Kalsey, gives a new meaning to the story of Siddhartha. Every new immigrant is a "Siddhartha," doing penance today for a livelihood. He has to leave his country and wander in a foreign land for salvation from hunger.

Mittar Rasha's poem "Banbas" (Exile), too, presents a mythical incident from the life of Rama, the Hindu god:

We've come to an exile
hungry and thirsty
We've come to an exile
By the time of departure
Mother "Koshalya" [Rama's mother]
wished good-bye
after kissing our brow.
We do hard toil
in the exile
lonely
No "Seeta" [Rama's wife]
No brother "Lakshman" [Rama's brother]
"Seeta" is far about ten thousand miles away
sends letters every day.

No body knows
What "Kakyee" [stepmother of Rama]
has gotten fulfilled her "wish"

and we have to go to an exile.
We left "Dashratha" [Rama's father]
behind in waiting for money orders
and counting days!

We've come to an exile
Hungry and thirsty
We've come to an exile! (Murmurs)

In the above poem the poet compares immigration to an exile, and an immigrant to Rama, the Hindu god, who had been exiled by his father, King Dashratha, in order to fulfill his stepmother's wish. Though this is a mythical story and the poet does not take it in its true meanings, he makes a parody of the incident, because every immigrant has come to this self-created exile at his own wish in order to earn money and to support relatives back in India. "Koshalya," "Dashratha," "Lakshman," "Kakyee," and "Seeta" are all characters from Ramayana, the Hindu epic. In the mythical story Rama was not alone in his exile - his brother Lakshman and his wife Seeta went along with him to the jungle.

In the poems based on social and political realities, there are some symbols of the martyrdom of patriots such as Bhagat Singh, Sukdev, and Kartar Singh Saraba, who were hanged in the struggle for the Indian Independence Movement. The poets remind us of their sacrifices by symbolising their martyrdom. Similarly, the revolutionary poets have used the symbols of Martin Luther King, Christ, Guevara, and Guru Govin Singh (the tenth of the gurus of the Sikhs). These great names are presented in some poems as symbols of sacrifice. For instance:

The Age of Christ was different
the world was in need of a hero
...
Today is a different age
Martin Luther King has died
for some talk of his name will surge,

and then no more.
He won't become Christ (CLT 26 (1977), 26-27)

Contribution to Canadian literature and culture

During the present decade more than forty collections and three thousand poems have been written by almost seventy-five Canadian Punjabi poets. These poems, published in book form or in various journals, have expanded the scope of Canadian literature and culture. The flowering of this poetry is an important feature of Canadian Punjabi culture. In order to bring to the attention of the larger Canadian community the contribution of Punjabi literature to the multicultural mosaic, efforts are being made to introduce Punjabi literature, particularly poetry, to the English/French-speaking world. One of the more significant efforts in the field is Stephen Gill's anthology of South Asian poets, Green Snow (1976), in which he includes three Punjabi poets, Rampuri Gurchuran, Ravi Ravinder, and Sidhu Gurumel. Although this work was a good step towards multicultural understanding, its scope is very limited.

Works by eight Canadian Punjabi poets have also appeared in the Punjabi issue of Contemporary Literature in Translation (Spring 1977), edited by Andreas Schroeder, with guest editor Surjeet Kalsey. The Punjabi issue gives a glimpse of Punjabi literature in translation, representing all four genres. In the limited space (forty pages) seven of the twenty-four writers included are major writers from India. During the visit of three of these seven - Dr. Haribhajan Singh, S. S. Misha, and Gurdial Singh - to Canada, bilingual (English-Punjabi) poetry readings and literary gatherings were arranged and were attended by a number of Canadian as well as Punjabi-speaking writers. Earlier, such poetry readings were arranged in Vancouver for Canadian Punjabi poets Gurcharan Rampuri in December of 1974 and for Ravi Ravinder in April of 1975. The object of these bilingual poetry readings has been to bring the different literatures and cultures closer together, and to provide a chance for each to know more about the other's culture.

Punjabis have been known for their bravery and hard work in the mills and factories, but they have been little known for their literature - such was the situation a decade ago. But during the 1970s Canadian Punjabi literature has come to the attention of the larger society. Thus, this has been a very important decade for the development of this literature, especially for poetry; during this period the number of works has increased many times over. To bring Punjabi poetry to the English-speaking world, much more work is needed in the area of translation. Some work has already been undertaken in this direction. Surjeet Kalsey has prepared an anthology of modern Punjabi poetry in English translation, which includes fifty-five poets of this century. She has translated and edited the works of these poets and written an introduction. Among other translations are Ravi Ravinder's Restless Soul (1979), Darshan Gill's Man and Mirror (1980), Mittar Rasha's Murmurs (1979), Ajmer Rode's Blue Meditations, Sukhinder's Freezing Cold, and Surjeet Kalsey's Speaking to the Winds (1979).

The short story

Stories in one form or another have existed throughout history. Story telling is an ancient art in India and bedtime stories have always been popular in the Indian tradition. In the Middle Ages the impulse to story-telling manifested itself in fables and epics about beasts, romantic heroes, knights-errant, kings and queens. In addition, there are Indian traditional and mythical stories in which animals are the wise and talking characters, such as the stories of the Panch Tantra of the third century written by Vishnu Sharma. Indians have a very rich and long tradition of mythical and ethical stories in the Vedas, Ramayana, and Mahabharata, scriptures that date back to approximately one thousand years before Christ. The Punjabi short story, evolving through fables and narrative epics, developed as a form of literary expression in the early years of the twentieth century. While it developed well in the Punjab during the succeeding years, not many Punjabi short story writers went abroad.

Among Canadian Punjabi short story writers there is only one author whose works are primarily based on experiences in Canada. This is Amarjit Chahal, whose first book of short stories, Bahron Aya Adami (A foreign returned man, 1980), contains eleven short stories written while in Canada and about the life experiences of Punjabis in Canada.

Ravi Ravinder published one work after coming to Canada in 1974, although he had published four collections of stories before. His Jite Deewaran Nahin (Where there are no walls, 1978) is a collection of prose stories, poetic stories, tales, and interviews. Most of the stories here, however, are the personal experiences of the author while he was in Kenya. Only two or three stories are about native Indians living in the remote areas of B.C.

There are two other Canadian Punjabi short story writers - Sadhu and Surjeet Kalsey - whose books are forthcoming. Sadhu's collection, Musa Bhajia Maut Ton (Fell from the sky, tumbled on a tree), contains twelve stories written in Canada about the life of both East Indians and non-East Indian Canadians. Similarly, Surjeet Kalsey's collection, Siah Hirde Sawait Rut (Black hearts white blood), contains twelve to fourteen short stories written after coming to Canada in 1974. These stories depict human relations and their interactions in a new homeland of Canada.

There is one other Canadian Punjabi writer, Hayer Tara Singh, who has published a collection, Te Siwa Balda Riha (And the pyre kept on burning, 1976); but this was published before his arrival in Canada.

In addition to the above, there are many writers who have started writing in Canada and have published in local publications. Among them are: Bains Darshan, Bhamipuri Tej, Bhangu Jaswinder, Bhatti Shamsher, Chahal Amarjit, Dhanjal Surinder Pal Singh, Ghuman Karamjit, Gill Avtar, Gill Manjit, Gill Paramjit, Gyani Kesar Singh, Haripal, Hundal Sukhwant, Jatana Dev, Surjeet Kalsey, Kingra Rajit Singh, Pawar Harbhajan, Ravi Ravinder, Ajmer Rode, Sadhu, Sandhu Bakhtawar Singh, Sandhu Balraj, Sing Jarnail, Sufi Amarjit, etc.

Within the limits of this chapter the short stories of the above writers will be looked at from a literary and socio-anthropological point of view, under three headings:

1. Stories with Canadian content
2. Stories with both Canadian and Punjabi content
3. Stories written in Canada but having Punjabi content of past memories

All the stories under consideration, whether they are about Canadian life or East Indian life, have social elements; they represent society in its many dimensions. The Canadian Punjabi writers have knowledge and experience of two different societies and cultures and are therefore able, through their craftsmanship, to link the two together. In the following, the works will be evaluated from the point of view of content and theme, plot, style, and characterisation.

Canadian content

Most of the stories in this category deal with the experiences of new immigrants: culture shock, thoughts and feelings about their new homeland, and so on. Among stories that deal with such topics are: "Do Punjabi Canada Vich" (Two Punjabis in Canada) by Bhangi Jaswinder, "Antar" (The difference) by Bhatti Shamsher, "Kar" (Car) by Chahal Amarjit, "Bagla Bhagat" (The hypocrites) by Dhanjal Surinder, "Rishtedari Da Mamla" (A matter of relationship) by Ghuman Karamjit, "Jawab" (The answer) bu Gill Avtar, "Khushi" (Happiness) and "Shashi" [a girl's name] by Gill Paramjit, "Linda" by Giani Kesar Singh, "Seniority" by Haripal, "Zameer" (Conscience) and "Aas" (Hope) by Hundal Sakhwant, "Dukhwa Kase Kahun ..." (Whom can I tell my grief?) and "Multvi Keeta Jewna" (Postponed life) by Surjeet Kalsey, "Sup" (The snake) by Kingra Ranjit Singh, "Cancer," "Apne Apne Ohle" (One's own secrets), and "Roh di Shelli" (A diction of rage) by Ravi Ravinder, "Number One" by Ajmer Rode, "Musa Bhajia Maut Ton" (Fell from the sky tumbled on a tree), "Ammanat" (A deposit), "Suagti Bhashan" (The welcome address), and "Muthi Da Reta" (The sand in the fist) by Sadhu, "Taxi Driver" by Sandhu Bakhtawar Singh, "Izat" (Respect) by Sandhu Tej, "Panj Hazari Suit" (The five-thousand-ruppee suit) by Singh Jarnail, and "Same De Belne Vich" (In the crusher of time) by Sufi Amarjit.

Amarjit Chahal's short story "Kar" (Translated as "A lady with a car - TSAR 2:1, 60-63) deals with a young immigrant couple, recently come to Canada from Punjab. The story reveals how their feelings, behaviour, and values have been transformed in the context of the new environment. The following passage is indicative of this:

> This is Sato's and her husband's new car for the new year. They change cars almost every year. ... Both husband and wife work. Their income is good; so are their expenses. Their furniture, crockery and

> paintings on the walls keep changing. They don't delay too much in replacing what they don't like in the house. And, of course, like all upper class people, they like going to and giving parties. When meeting strangers they present their business card, too, which, in fact, is false.
>
> Let me clear up another false impression. They were not born and brought up in the West, but in Panjab. They got their education up to high school level, like other ordinary people: with concessionary fees in government schools. They were not fortunate enough to attend college or university. Now their conversation gives the impression that one studied at Dalhousie and the other at Nainital.
>
> Well, let's leave this topic. I want to tell you that Sato's elder brother is scheduled to land at the airport tomorrow. Accordingly, she has dropped her husband Mike (Malkeet Singh) at his work and will herself go shopping in the city. The city is not very far; it's only fifty or fifty-five miles away, which distance she can easily drive while listening to a single tape of songs. The car is furnished with a tape recorder and a radio. There is also a special "tape-box" in which you can find songs from all films, the oldest to the latest films. And for the times when they miss their mother-tongue, there are a few tapes full of voluptuous Panjabi songs too.

Amarjit Chahal is very good at narrating minute details. Along with the details he conveys the theme of the story, i.e., how some new immigrants have changed with the changing environment. Further on he tells us that Sato is that girl who was spanked by her father for learning to ride a bicycle, but now she handles her car proudly. Not only have they changed their way of life, but their names as well.

Sadhu's stories "Musa Bhajia Maut Ton," "Muthi Da Reta," "Juti de Yaar," and "Suagti Bhashan" are representative of the life of New Canadians as they interact with the new culture and society. Immigrants come to Canada to earn money and to make their fortune, but they have to face many difficulties, such as culture shock, racial prejudice, discrimination, and exploitation by their relatives or by leaders of their own community. Sadhu portrays one such leader in his story "Suagti Bhashan" (The welcome address - TSAR 2:1, 70-71):

> The restlessness among the audience was increasing rapidly, but their voices were drowned by the loud voice of Sardir Sahib ji from the speakers. One member of the audience dared to stand up. Waving his arm in the air he shouted, "We don't want to listen to this nonsense; it should stop." Sardir Sahib ji, interrupted, turned red with anger, and started again in a rage: "Look at these boys, how dare they say this? Don't they know who I am? ... Well, do they know how much money my father spent on this temple? You are telling me that you don't want to listen to this nonsense?
>
> ...
>
> The whole temple was filled with commotion; people talked in groups. Sardar Sahib ji's speech was lost amidst the noise ... Sardar Sahib ji and his fellow organizers slipped out through the back door with the chief guest, his smile still stretched across his face. A little later a few cars arrived, squealing like naughty kids and calmness spread through the temple.

Haripal's story, "Seniority," and Sukhwant Hundal's stories, "Zameer" (Conscience) and "Aas" (Hope), depict the problem of corruption in the mills. They deal with the unemployment problem, too, and show how the new immigrants have to face real difficulties in obtaining jobs, because of language and other cultural barriers.

There are a few short stories which are written about English-speaking Canadians. Ajmer Rode, Giani Kesar Singh, and Ravi Ravinder have written such stories. They have picked up a particular person or incident from Canadian society. For instance, Rode's story, "No. 1," deals with the problem of violence in North Amerca; the writer depicts a particular incident of a psychopath who gives rides to beautiful young girls with the intention of killing them. Giani Kesar Singh's "Linda" is a story of a student who was a problem child for her parents and for other people around her. The writer shows how counselling helps problem children like Linda. Ravi Ravinder's stories are based on his personal experiences and immediate reactions towards other people, including colleagues. "Cancer," "Apne Apne Ohle" (One's own secrets), and "Roh Di Shelli" (A diction of rage) are such stories, in which Ravinder has depicted native Indian women and their attitudes towards men.

Surjeet Kalsey and Paramjit Gill are the two women writers who depict themes relating to the life of East Indian women in Canada. Kalsey's stories, "Dukhwa Kase Kahun" (Whom can I tell my grief?) and "Multvi Kita Jena" (Postponed life), are about how husbands treat their wives and how their husbands' relatives look down on them. These stories depict the loneliness of such married women, who feel isolated because of their husbands' behaviour. They seek sympathy from others but do not receive honest sympathy. Instead, rumours disgrace them.

Paramjit Gill's stories, "Shashi" [A girl's name]i and "Khushi" (Happiness), portray battered Indian women. Nothing has changed with the move to the new country. The Indian woman's place in the Canadian environment remains the same as it had been in India. The relationship between the husband and wife in such unchanging traditions has been minutely shown by the writer in her story "Shashi." Although the wife tries to improve her condition, she has to live according to the wishes of her husband as well as tradition. In one place, for example, her husband says:

> Look! If you have been so dear to your parents, forget it now - you are my wife, and you have no powers to check me whatever I do, or wherever I go; you are only a woman! You - woman; I am a man - A Man, understand? You cannot open your mouth in front of me, if you dare so I'll thrash your bones into pulp ... (WD (Jul 1979)

Paramjit's story "Khushi" (Happinesss) represents a similar situation. In this story a desperate woman seeks shelter with her friend, but she is refused by the friend, who is afraid of scandal and does not want to become involved. How relationships between friends change!

Karamjit Guman's story "Aakal" (Wisdom), Sadhu's "Jelly" and "Coffee shop," Gill Avtar's "Jawab" (Answer) and "Pataka" (The short), Shamsher Bhatti's "Antar" (Difference), Jaswinder Bhangu's humorous satire "Two Punjabis in Canada," and Bharminder Deol's satire "Do Ganje" (Two balled men) are stories that deal with Canadian East Indian life.

Karamjit Guman's story, "Rishtedari Da Mamla" (A matter of relationship) and Amarjit Sufi's story, "Same De Belne Vich" (In the crusher of time), deal with visitors and their exploiters. Whether the exploiters are relatives or others, the visitors who want to live in Canada illegally have to face many difficulties.

Jarnail Singh's story, "Panj Hazari Suit" (The five-thousand-rupee suit), exposes the mean nature of some immigrants who have come from poverty and never seen big money or expensive clothes in their lives. Their continuing miserly habits in Canada, even though they earn good money, and how such people or such habits betray them, give others a wrong impression about East Indians.

Stories with both Canadian and Punjabi content

Amarjit Chahal's stories "Mukhra Chan Varga" (The face, like moon), "Aakhri Din" (Last days), and "Bahron Aya Adami" (A foreign returned man); Jagdev Yatana's story, "Ih Saman, Uh Saman" (This time, that time); Paramjit Gill's "Nahin Labne Lal Guwache" (What is lost is lost); Bakhtawar Singh Sandhu's "Taxi Driver"; Sukhwant Hundal's "Pardesi" (A foreigner); and Surjeet Kalsey's "Muk Gayian Udika" (No more waitings) - these are stories that depict incidents from both countries. For example, in "Mukhra Chan Verga) a young Punjabi man goes back to his country, after earning good money in Canada, to buy land. His wife and mother are waiting for him. Once in India, he discovers that his mother is living with another man, because all her life his father has been living in foreign countries. When his mother reveals this and advises him to take his wife to Canada, he feels guilty and makes up his mind to take his wife along with him this time. Such a soul-searing story is perhaps the first of its kind in Punjabi to touch on such a sensitive theme.

"Aakhrai Din" (Last days) deals with the emotions and feelings of an old couple who have come to Canada to live with their son. But they find that their son and his wife consider them to be a burden, and they are sent to the farms to work and to live there in cabins. As he spends the last days of his life on the farm, the father day-dreams about the good old days he and his wife spent in Punjab. The story thus presents a contrast of life and values: the Westernised young man and his family on the one hand and the old parents with their traditional thoughts and feelings on the other.

Sukhwant Hundal's mini-story, "Pardesi" (A foreigner), reveals how the children of East Indian Canadians forget their language and culture. This situation is deeply shocking for their parents. The following paragraph describes the shock:

> Sitting beside the fire place, basking in the warmth of the fire, he smiled recalling how foolish those people are who think themselves to be outsiders here ... He thought: Everything is available here - every type of food, facilities, comfort; even corn-chappatis and "sag", and now even mangoes are available.
> They often complain that we are outsiders, and we don't ever feel at home here. They should know, everything is available here, if only they can spend money to buy the things ...
> It's said - Home, sweet home, nothing is sweeter than one's own home! I own this house here, as I did in Punjab. This is my sweet home, I can do anything here - I can dance Punjabi "bhangra", I can sing Punjabi folk songs of Mirza [a folk hero] here ... With this thought he turned the radio on, and his favourite Punjabi song was on ... laughing at the people, he was so absorbed in the Punjabi songs and the music that he didn't know his eldest daughter Sherry had switched off the radio and switched on a comedy show on Television.
>
> When he asked Sherry why, she replied in English: "I don't like Punjabi". With his thoughts shattered he felt that taking this home to be his own "Sweet Home" was an illusion.
>
> (WD (Jan-Feb 1979), p. 19)

Similarly, Jagdev Jatana's "Ih Saman Uh Saman" (This time that time), Paramjit Gill's "Nahin Labne Lal Guwache (What is lost is lost), and Surjeet Kalsey's "Muk Gayian Udikan Udikan" (No more waitings) are stories that depict cultural shock as well as the values of both cultures.

There are a few stories which cross cultural barriers and national boundaries and explore the depths of the human mind. Such stories deal with such universal themes as grief, love and infidelity, restlessness, modern man's dilemma, etc. For instance, Karanjit Gurman's story, "Sunna Khayal" (Thinking void), is about a married woman whose husband loves her very much, but who always thinks about another man, who is her husband's friend and visits them quite often. Though she has no wish to develop an affair with the man, her mental infidelity is obvious; Karamjit Guman has captured this notion very skilfully in his story. Manjit Gill's story, "Bechani" (Restlessness), is about a married woman who craves to become a mother. When her desire is fulfilled, her restlessness disappears.

Ravi Ravinder's "Kilan" (Nails) depicts modern man's dilemma in this scientifically advanced age. The following are a few paragraphs from the story:

> "Let's drive nails - big nails - into the road."
>
> "What for?"
>
> "So that running fast on the tires life may burst out."
>
> "What difference would it make?"
>
> "We'll realize our complete being, our increased speed."
>
> ...
>
> "Nails can be driven into a runway even."
>
> "How can you stop satellites?"
>
> "With the weight of the world's total poverty and disease. Why can't we make our earth worth living in before beautifying the face of the moon?"
>
> "A single swallow doesn't make summer."
>
> "What's this you are eating?"
>
> "Mood elevators, tranquilizers, librium, sleeping pill, heroin,

morphia - how many names, how many forms of the same thing - means of salvation from sorrow!"

"Why do you need them?"

"This is the century of drugs. After all, we have to eat something. By eating these the mind grows calm. If I do not eat them the century looks sick."

...

"The way to the crossroads. At the crossroads we'll sleep in peace. After reaching there I shall feel as if I've escaped from the swollen ocean of directions, paths, destinations, stages, and have reached a quiet island. Nothingness, where the brain is free from all strains. We are all nowhere - religion, deeds, knowledge, science, life, society, philosophy, politics, crime, ethics - if we are somewhere, we are only at the crossroads ... (JDN)

"Nails" and some other stories by Ravi Ravinder have universal themes, and the author philosophises about man's situation in space and the atomic age. He shows that man is caught in the modern mechanical chaos and finds refuge in drugs.

Stories written in Canada with Punjabi content of past memories

Some Canadian Punjabi writers write about their past experiences, memories, or incidents that took place back in their homeland before they came to Canada. Although such writers now live in a different environment, culture, and society, their imagination still wanders back in search of themes from their past environment. For example, there are stories which depict the famous "Emergency Rule" in India: Darshan Bain's story "Chanan Ho Gya" (The day had dawned), Bakhtawar Singh Sandhu's "Taxi Driver," and Tej Bhamipuri's "Kherian Da Bhaun" (Insects' crowd). Shamsher Bhatti's story "Charwahe" (The shepherds) portrays the childhood of his friends and himself, when they used to go out to graze their animals in the meadows of their village in Punjab.

Ranjit Singh Kingra's "Anhoi Hakeekat" (The unhappened reality), Gill Avtar's "Ghala Mala" (Cheating), Bukkan's "Badla" (Revenge), Manjit Gill's "Bechani" (Restlessness), Sukdev Flora's "Sab Kuch Tut Gya" (Everything broke down), Balraj Sandhu's "Hunje Hoe Khet" (The swept fields) and "Miti De Khidone" (The clay toys), Ravinder Ravi's "Haume" (Ego), Dev Jatana's "Sadhran" (Wishes), Kulwat Sihota's "Kanoon Di Ulangna" (Violation of the law), and Surjeet Kalsey's "Dhagian Vich Jakri" (Confined by the threads) are stories set in an East Indian background, most of them relating to incidents from Punjab. Almost all the characters belong to Punjab as well. Harbhajan Pawar's "Amar Piyar" (Immortal love), Ravi Ravinder's "Moh De Hoth Ret Di Jheel" (Lips of love - lake of sand), Karamjit Guman's "Sunna Khyal" (Thinking in void), and Tej Bhami Puri's "Vafa Leeor Leer" (Torn fidelity) are love stories which bring back the romantic situations and incidents that had taken place in the hills and valleys of the Himalayas.

Many of Giani Kesar Singh's stories have a South Asian content as well. His story "The Holy Man" is about a Mahatma Gandhi, and "Grow More Trees" draws a picture of the July Plantation celebrations in Punjab: the story describes the weather during the month of July in Punjab:

> It was the first week of July and the season in which the wind blows from the South-east. The season during which this wind blows usually brings heavy rains but the rains had not yet set in. It was scorchingly hot. The earth was burning with the hot sun. The ponds were dry. Cattle were resting under the shades of trees. Cowherds had only loin-clothes on their bodies. Their brown bodies were shining with the white pearls of perspiration like dew-drops. High in the sky were some white clouds which seemed stagnant. There wasn't any hope of rain. Very often a hot wind blew across the plain which left these cowherds restless. (Unpublished)

Plot

The art of the Punjabi short story in Canada is still in its infancy, given that most of the writers started writing during the decade 1970-1980, and after coming to Canada. Many of them have published only one or two stories. We shall discuss here the plots of only a few of the more successful stories. Among these are: Chahal Amarjit's "Akhri Din" (The last days) and "Mukhra Chan Varga" (The face, like moon), Gill Paramjit's "Nahin Labne Lal Guwache" (What is lost, is lost), Ghuman Karamjit's "Rishtedati Da Mamla" (A matter of relationship), Surjeet Kalsey's "Multvi Keeta Jewna" (Postponed life), Singh Jarnail's "Panj Hazari Suit" (The five-thousand-rupee suit), Sadhu's "Amanat" (A deposit), and Sufi Amarjit's "Same De Belne Vich" (In the crusher of time).

All these stories have a simple setting, and the writers have woven the incidents together smoothly and successfully. For instance, Amarjit Chahal has built a closely knit and compact plot in "Akhri Din" (The last days). The story begins thus:

> It was very early in the morning when Sardool Singh woke up. There was light in the shack, and everything was quite visible ...
>
> ...
>
> It was 4 o'clock in the morning and he wanted to make a cup of tea for himself and for his old wife. Suddenly, it occurred to him why shouldn't he call his wife Nasib Kaur who was in a deep sleep in the adjoining room. But he shunned the idea when he thought how tired she must be after doing ten hours of work a day ... For ten years they have been doing hard work in the farms. Sardool Singh had to resign his job as a Lambardar [Government revenue officer in Punjab] before coming to Canada...
>
> ...
>
> Then his thoughts were entangled in the events of those years when he and his wife were sponsored by his son in Canada. (BAA)

In the next ten pages, the writer relates through the working of Sardool Singh's mind, the things that happened to him and his wife while living with their son in Canada, how his son had treated them in their old age, and ultimately how they were asked to work on the farms and spend their last days in the shacks. Sardool Singh's son considered his parents to be not only a burden, but old-fashioned as well, and they were unable to keep his remodelled house clean. This morning Sardool Singh is pondering on this indifferent attitude of his son and relatives. Towards the end of the story, Sardool Singh, while thinking of all these incidents, makes two cups of tea and brings them to his wife's shack. He calls her two or three times. When he receives no answer, he goes to her bed and feels her body with his hands. There is no sign of life left in her. She is dead! This is the climax of the plot which is well knit through a series of incidents. Amarjit Chahal is successful not only in depicting how the traditional and cultural values change with the changing of economic values, but also in transmitting the idea of how the old parents of the immigrants have to spend their last days miserably in a strange environment.

In "Amanat" (A deposit), Sadhu exposes the complicated life of immigrant teenagers. Young boys and girls have no freedom to love. They have to keep their affairs strictly guarded, because their parents are so strict and will not allow them to move around or behave like their Western peers. Through successive incidents the author builds the story around a young girl who is in love with a young boy in her community. The story starts with a group of teenagers going home after school. Sito, the heroine of the story, is among them. Suddenly she is taken aback by the loud sound of the horn of a car passing by. She at once recognises the car of her former lover. Now the sight of the car fills her heart with hatred towards him as well as towards such people. The author here narrates the story of "such people" through the stream of consciousness of Sito. She begins to recall the days she spent with Kelley, her lover. The car reminds her of his bad intentions, how she had taken him seriously and thought of marrying him, but how he had betrayed her and gone to India to marry some "chaste" girl. When Sito came to know about Kelley's scheme, she felt like committing suicide because of his rejection and betrayal. While in this state of mind she received a phone call from Kelley's friend, who told her that she had been left by Kelley as a "deposit" for them, and invited her to make love with him!. This is the reality which unfolds in front of her eyes when Kelley's friend, Micky, phones her and calls her a "call girl." The author has woven these complicated threads skilfully together, depicting the unstable situation of teenage South Asian immigrants. The story ends with a boomerang touch, i.e., the story begins with the incident in which Sito is walking home from school, and it ends with the same scene in which Sito is frightened by the loud horn.

The plot of "Nahin Labne Lal Guwache" (What is lost, is lost) by Gill Paramjit, again begins and ends with the same scene, giving it a boomerang effect as in Chahal's "Akhri Din" and Sadhu's "Amanat." "Nahin Labne Lal Guwache" begins with an incident in Ferry, where the heroine, Ranan, refuses to recognise an old friend, but this makes her mind wander into the miserable past which caused her to behave so discreetly. Raman has nothing against her friend, but she is so scared of her own sufferings that she does not want to share them with anyone. In the middle of the story the author relates a series of incidents through Raman's memories: how she was used by her relatives, how she was kicked out of her husband's house, and above all how she faced all the disgrace that society had thrown upon her. She struggled to be strong and demanded equal rights with men, but in this pursuit she earned only disgrace from the community. Thus the plot of the story has been woven around the incidents that happened in the past, but the story ends with the hidden emotions of Raman as she looks at her girl friend, who is also trying to show her intimacy. Although the story lacks dramatic elements, a climax or an anti-climax, yet it has a narrative quality that makes a lasting impact on the reader.

"Panj Hazari Suit" (The five-thousand-rupee suit) by Singh Jarnail has a different kind of plot. He does not use the boomerang formula; he narrates the story directly as it happened, although the story runs flat without any climax or anti-climax. The incidents are arranged chronologically. It is the story of a new immigrant who wishes to buy an expensive suit for himself. After giving much thought to it, he purchases a custom-made three-piece suit at a cost of three hundred and fifty dollars. But he is so meek and afraid of his sister that he can not tell her about it. And when she comes to know about his extravagant shopping, she considers him a fool, becomes very angry, and insists that the suit be returned to the store, because it is too expensive for him. After all he is still unmarried. So, he has to return the suit to the store. A few days after the incident, he goes to the store again and sees the same suit on display at a reduced price of one hundred and seventy-five dollars only. He is overcome with a yearning to possess it again. But when he takes the suit to the cashier, he refuses to sell it. The sister is told of the incident and, with her approval, he sends one of his friends to buy it. The salesperson, however, again refuses to sell it, for no apparent reason. On seeing his friend coming empty-handed from the store, the young man wonders whether all Hindus look alike for a white man. The story ends here on a flat descriptive note.

There are some other short stories which are mere narrations of incidents; their plots are rather weak. Sometimes they are loosely built and advance towards predictable situations. For instance, Amarjit Sufi's story, "Same De Belne Vich" (In the crusher of time), presents such a plot. The story recounts a problem faced by visitors who try to hide illegally in this vast country but cannot cheat the police too long. This story creates an intense and breath-taking atmosphere, for it is evident that the visitor, keeping himself hidden from the police, has gone to some remote area of northern B.C., and the police chase is expected at any time. The plot is built around this chase and how the visitor goes through such a frightening situation and escapes. The story is merely a description of an intense chase, but the visitor, holding his breath and remaining hidden in a hollow tree, holds the attention of the reader. Although the story does not have all the characteristics of a short story, it is interesting reading.

"Rishetadari Da Mamla" (A matter of relationship) by Ghuman Karamjit is again a story about a visitor who is being exploited by one of his relatives, his uncle Sukha Singh. The visitor, Ninder, is rather naive about life in Canada. He therefore relies upon his uncle, who not only encourages Ninder to work illegally, but also takes all his earnings just to provide him with food and shelter. The writer depicts with subtle touches Ninder's inner feelings and how gradually a strong resentment overtakes him, when he realises the mean nature of his uncle. The plot of the story advances, towards its climax, when Ninder's boss decides to give him a raise. But the uncle, not knowing this, threatens Ninder that somebody has told his boss about his status and so he should please him by giving him a gift, like a tape-recorder, that might cost him four hundred dollars. The uncle demands four hundred dollars and assures him that he will take care of everything. Ninder, laughing up his sleeve, grips his uncle's neck tightly and warns him that, if he tells his boss about his status, he will tell everything to the immigration department, because the uncle is the one who has exploited him. So the story ends with a reversal of the situation.

Most of Ravi Ravinder' stories are first-person narrations. The writer is present everywhere as one of the main characters in the stories. He begins stories like this: "This was my first winter in Canada ..." or: "Suddenly, I met her on a road near The Hitler Hotel in Nairobi ..." Ravinder's stories have the quality of travelogues, in which the incidents, and particularly the characters whom the author has met while travelling in different places, are described through first-person narration. Some of his stories, such as "Cancer," "What Would Happen to the Sun," "Space Race," "Nails," and "In Waiting for Death," could easily be excluded from the traditional type of short story, for they defy even the basic norms of structure and form of the traditional short story. Although these stories depict strong emotions of love, hatred, resentment, desperation, and so on, their plots have not been woven together with any incidents or situations. Ravinder's "Apne Apne Ohle" (One's own secrets), on the other hand, is in the form of a memoir, written about his arrival in Canada and his starting a new job. In the process he tries to locate his former colleagues. Then he depicts incidents relating to the life of one of them, Linda, and her husband. Towards the end of the story the writer shows Linda's expressions of love towards him.

"Multvi Keeta Jewna" (Postponed life) by Surjeet Kalsey, is the story of a battered woman who, every time when she is mistreated, decides to seek help from the outside - from a social worker or some crisis agency. But each time the flood of her husband's rage calms down, and she tries to forget the incident and compromises. The story points out how battered women, like Puro, cannot even think about leaving their homes, husbands, and children, no matter how bad the circumstances they have to face; they are tradition-bound women. But Puro tries to be a strong woman and arranges an appointment with a social worker, for she is determined to explain her situation and to seek help. Up to this point the story seems to be advancing towards its climax, i.e., something must happen when Puro exposes her husband's behaviour. However, the incidents and emotional ups and downs take place in such a way that Puro is forced to compromise again. But the reader does not know about her decision until the next morning when she cancels her appointment and assures the social worker that nothing has happened between her and her husband, although she is feeling the pain of bruises all over her body. The plot is neatly woven from beginning to end, especially the incidents of Puro's emotional ups and downs, her affection for her two and half year-old son, and her fear of rumours and disgrace. Thus the story depicts an incurable social disease that affects many homes in the Punjabi community.

Characterisation

In most of the stories under consideration the characters are Punjabis, and they are living in their new homeland, adjusting themselves to the new surroundings, earning money, working hard, holding on to their traditional values; they are very ordinary, familiar people. However, some writers have introduced Western characters, too. Linda in Giani Kesar Singh's story, "Linda," Linda and her husband Van in Ravi Ravinder's "Apne Apne Ohle," Henery and Milini in Ajmer Rode's story, "Number One," and Jack in Sadhu's "Juti De Yaar." The characters in most of these works are not fully developed. That is, they tend to be static, and the writers only reveal their nature to the reader through incidents or dialogue, or by using the method of psychoanalysis. As we know, the short story does not have the scope to develop the characters fully, but sometimes, with changing situations, they seem to develop. For instance, Raman in "Nahin Labhne Lal Guwache," Puro in "Multvi Keeta Jewna," Sardool Singh and his son in "Akhri Din," etc., are characters who seem to develop, but actually change only according to their changing situations. Sometimes they do not intend what they do, but their helplessness forces them to behave in that way. Generally speaking, the characters in the Canadian Punjabi short stories are honest and sincere in their feelings, for example, as regards what they feel about the changed atmosphere and surroundings. While depicting their feelings about new situations, they unconsciously keep comparing the two cultures and life styles.

One thing is common among these characters: they work hard, because they have come to this country for a better life. For those characters that belong to the older generation, nothing has changed - love, hatred, compassion, sympathy are all the same. They throw parties at weekends, get together, eat, drink, and enjoy life in their own way. They want their children to follow their traditions and culture, but they feel that this is not possible, as their children become westernised. Amarjit's story, "Ehsas" (Realisation) and Sadhu's "Amanat" (A deposit) show this type of feeling among immigrants whose children do not know what to follow and what not to follow in the two cultures. They are confused, and the confusion leads them to disobey their parents, their social and traditional values. Peter in "Ehsas" is one example of such a child. Sito in "Amanat" is an embodiment of the teenagers' problem of love and marriage. Puro, Tari, and Shashi are typical Indian housewives - battered, desperate, and low in status. Sardool Singh and his wife represent the desperation of the elderly immigrant

Style

All the writers considered here use the diction and idiom of their own regions. In other words, if a writer comes from a rural background, he uses that type of language and dialogue; if a writer belongs to an urban area, he uses urbanite diction. But sometimes a writer uses diction according to his characters. Ravi Ravinder's stories show his formal style and urbane language, and the dialogue tends to be generally romantic. This is perhaps because many of his stories have romantic women characters. Paramjit Gill's stories also have characters who have come from urban backgrounds, though with the traditional setting. Most of them are housewives and they talk in informal language. The stories of Amarjit Chahal and Sadhu give the impression of informal diction, sometimes to the extent of being colloquial or using slang. Their characters come from a rural background, and they sometimes speak a rather rustic language. The language of some of the stories shows the influence of English words. Words such as the following are common in their dialogue: "dale" for dollars, lunch time, coffee time, lay off, best wishes card, visitors, help, loan, speed, shopping, dry clean, suit, counter, kitchen, living room, washroom, design, salesman, kilo for kilometre, etc. etc.

While explaining a situation or an incident that takes place in Canada, some writers use analogies from Punjab. For instance, in the story, "In the

Crusher of Time," the author compares the police search for a visitor ("In seconds, red blue lights and the loudly shrieking police cars came rushing") with the siege of the fort of the "Jamraud" by the army of General Hari Singh Nalua of Punjab. Again the writer makes an analogy between the jungles of northern B.C. and the jungles of "Machhiwara," Punjab. The story also reminds us of a traditional but orthodox way of saving oneself from the dreadful shadow of bad luck, i.e., if one chants the hymns, one can be saved. In "Akhri Din" Amarjit Chahal presents the imagery of Canadian green fields in the morning and the chirping of the swallows that resemble the morning scenes in the Punjab.

Contribution to Canadian literature and culture

The Canadian Punjabi short stories bring a new element to Canadian literature by introducing their characteristic styles, images, and subject matter. They contribute to Canadian multicultural society by adding more variety to it. The stories are reflections of the life of South Asian immigrants in Canada; their culture, traditions, customs, manners, way of living, and language speak through them. To the extent that a literature of a community is an important factor in helping others to understand that community, the Punjabi short stories help in developing a better understanding of the Punjabis in Canada.

The Punjabi stories being written in Canada play an important role within the Punjabi-speaking community as well. They bring out different aspects of the life of the East Indians living in different parts of the country. Thus, knowledge of the situations, difficulties, and opportunities in one part of the country become available to people living in other parts as well. These stories are, of course, not merely physical descriptions of the situations, but also convey emotional aspects, which are far more important. Some of the stories depict the hardships that the new immigrants have to face on entering this country, and others the difficulties and discrimination they encounter because of language problems or because they belong to a different culture and tradition. Above all, though, the stories provide good reading.

It is true that Punjabi short stories are at present a small distinct stream, but it is to be hoped that they will eventually become a part of the ocean of Canadian literature. Isolated individual efforts have been made to translate some of these stories and thus to make them available to the English reader ("Confined by the Threads" and "Mirage in the Cave" by Surjeet Kalsey and "Nails" by Ravi Ravinder have appeared in the Canadian Fiction Magazine), but no collection of translated short stories is available.

The novel[29]

The Punjabi novel is the least attempted of all the genres in Canadian Punjabi literature. In fact, Giani Kesar Singh, with five novels and working on a sixth, is the only Punjabi novelist who has published his novels while living in Canada.[30]

This situation is not, however, unexpected. The novel, compared with other genres, requires longer and uninterrupted time periods and demands more concentrated effort from the author. This longer time and concentration are simply not available in the Canadian Punjabi literary environment, since most of the Punjabi writers are recent immigrants to this country; they are too pre-occupied with the struggle for settlement here and with earning a livelihood. They are not yet settled enough to ponder on the social and cultural values of their new homeland; their minds are not yet free to indulge in longer creative activities. They are, for the most part, still in a state of cultural shock. Their immediate reaction to this situation is generally emotional, which is expressed more easily and immediately through poetry and short stories. When their reactions and feelings grow more mature and philosophical, there will, in all likelihood, be more novelists on the Canadian Punjabi scene.

Giani Kesar Singh has published the following novels while living in Canada: Jangi Kaedi (Prisoners of war), 1969, Shaheed Udham Singh (Martyr Udham Singh), 1973), Baba Hari Singh Usman [a a name], 1975, Shaheed Madan Lal Dhingra (Martyr ...), 1977, and Shaheed Mewa Singh Lopoke (Martyr ...), 1978. These novels will be discussed under theme, plot, characterisation, and style.

Theme

All the novels published so far by Giani Kesar Singh are historical. A sixth novel, Nehun Na Lagde Jorin (in process) is based on non-historical events. He is essentially an historian, having already published a history book. Each of his novels is the biography of a martyr, and in fact his chief purpose in writing is to immortalise the forgotten martyrs of the Indian Independence Movement. This purpose emerges clearly in all of his novels, because, even when he is dealing with the history of an important movement, embodying many equally important characters, he never fails to creat a hero in the novel. This is especially evident in Shaheed Madan Lal Dhingra.

In this work, India House, a private house rented by Indian students in London, is shown as a central place where Indian patriots used to meet to discuss politics and Indian independence. Among these patriots, Shiamji Krishan Verna, editor of the newspaper Indian Sociologist, and Shri Vinaik Damodar Sawarkar were very influential and leading personalities, whose individual contributions to the Independence Movement are well known. But since the novel is written about Madan Lal Dhingra, both Shiamji and Swarkar remain in the background, while Dhingra emerges as the unfailing hero of the novel. Similarly, in Shaheed Mewa Singh Lopoke, while important personalities like Bhai Bhag Singh, Balwant Singh, Sohan Lal Pathak, and Hassan Rahim are characterised, they become secondary in comparison to the hero, Mewa Singh, although Sohan Lal Pathak and Balwant Singh in particular had made a greater contribution to the movement and had even been killed in its service. In other words, these historical novels are biographical novels.

Apart from this dominant theme, the novelist never fails to expose the hypocrisy of so-called British Justice. He also hits hard at the white racist prejudices in the novel Shaheed Mewa Singh Lopoke. Again, in each of his novels, Indians living in foreign countries like the USA, Canada, England, and South East Asia are shown as becoming aware and conscious of the slavery of their motherland. Every novel portrays some kind of struggle by the Indian to gain dignity and respect among the peoples of the world. Thus, a secondary but important theme in these novels is the preservation of the history of the Indian Independence Movement in foreign lands.

Plot

Since all the novels under consideration are historical, the story in each case is pre-determined, or at least the main story is known already to both the writer and the reader. The writer, of course, has had to dig out the incidents and happenings and episodes in order to construct the full story, since in all of the novels the full story is constructed by arrranging the incidents and happenings in chronological order; the writer is therefore historian and fiction writer at one and the same time. Once the story is laid out, the role of the historian is over. It is then up to the novelist to weave a plot based on this story.

There are, of course, different kinds of historical novel, with varying scope for developing a plot. There could be a novel in which history is exploited as a background for a series of adventures or happenings, where all the characters and most of the events are imaginary. Tolstoy's War and Peace, for example, is such a novel, as it merely mirrors history in its essence and does not present the actual historical details. On the other hand, there are other historical novels, in which the novelist tries to present real historical characters in their historical setting. Irving Stone's Lust for Life is one such work. Sometimes the entire novel is written to portray a certain historical figure. Most of the novels written by Giani Kesar Singh are of this third type. The difficulty in this type of novel is that history tends to dominate and, if the novelist is not skilfull, the novel may end up being an historical document, which is basically what has happened in Singh's novels.

In the novel Shaheed Udham Singh, for example, the plot is built around the life of a well known martyr, Udham Singh, who kills O'dwire, a British Governor of Punjab, who is retired and lives in England. The story begins in India with the childhood of Udham Singh in Amritsar, Punjab. The youthful Udham is moved by an historic incident, the "Jalianwala Bagh Massacre" in Amritsar, where hundreds of innocent people were shot by the British police under instructions from O'dwire. Having witnessed the dreadful incident with his own eyes and finding the injustice unbearable, Udham quietly decides to teach a lesson to the British officials responsible for the incident. In pursuit of his goal he leaves India and goes to England. Carefully planning his moves, he learns everything about O'dwire and also trains himself in shooting. All the time he lives disgsuised and under a fictitious name. Finally, he is able to shoot and kill General O'dwire at a public meeting and is hanged in England. After this incident, Udham Singh emerges as an Indian patriot and a hero of immense popularity.

The historical incidents in the novel are chronologically arranged. To weave the plot successfully around the basic incident, the author has to invent numerous fictional scenes. The history, however, remains a prominent feature of the novel. In fact, towards the end the historian becomes dominant over the novelist. This is evidenced by the numerous actual court trial dates cited.

The novel Baba Hari Singh Usman begins in the USA, moves to the islands of Java, reaches its climax in Burma, and concludes in India. The author is very successful in building up the plot to embody a vast number of happenings in many different situations and countries. Hari Singh was an ordinary labourer in the United States during the early 1920s. Working among free Americans, he became aware of the value of freedom and developed an acute realisation of the conditions that existed in "slave India" at that time. Eventually he became involved in the freedom movement of India and boarded a ship going to South East Asia. One the way he and his companions were caught smuggling firearms for anti-British activities in South-east Asia and were to be hanged. Hari Singh escaped his captors and re-appeared in Java. He lived there in disguise for several years, after marrying a local woman. That was the time when he assumed his new name, Usman Khan. Later, when the Japanese and British were involved in the war in South East Asia, Hari Usman Singh left Java and came to Burma. There he joined the Indian freedom fighters, trying to organise attacks on British India with the aim of driving the British out of the country. Hari Singh played a leading role in the movement. After it came to an unsuccessful end, Hari Singh, one of the few survivors, came back to his native village in Punjab and passed the rest of his old age quietly as a relatively unknown man.

Throughout the novel the story remains close to history; the incidents, historical and fictional, are structured in a way that leads to one of the most impressive plots constructed by this novelist.

The plot is rather weaker in Shaheed Madan Lal Dhingra. Although the incidents move in different directions, loosely joined, the story starts in India, moves to the Middle East for a short while, then proceeds to England, where most of the story unfolds and winds up. The plot remains uni-dimensional throughout. The parts that take place in the Middle East and old England could easily be eliminated from the novel, although the descriptions of the situations are in both cases powerful. Dhingra is shown to be moved by the utter poverty in both regions. In London, while a student of medicine, he starts going to the Indian House meetings, where he is influenced by the powerful personalities of some Indian freedom fighters like Saworker. He becomes fully involved in the Indian freedom movement, both intellectually and emotionally, but gradually he becomes disillusioned with the over-intellectual atmosphere in the India House and ceases to participate in the meetings. He wants some action so that the freedom movement can find new life; he has developed an unbearable hatred of the slavery in India under British rule. Consequently, he makes his plans and kills Sir Curzon Willy, a member of the British Imperial Government. The novel is valuable in that it immortalises an important Indian freedom fighter, hitherto little remembered.

Shaheed Mewa Singh Lopoke is a novel which is set entirely in Canada and represents a good blend of history and fiction. The story is simple at the beginning and does not seem impressive. Later, however, it becomes more involved, and the author is able to construct a reasonably successful plot. One difficulty confronting the novelist is the fact that Mewa Singh, the hero, remains a very ordinary person for most of the story. But, since the novelist seems committed to present Mewa Singh as a hero, he constructs many incidents that characterise Mewa Singh but seem otherwise quite unimportant. Whenever he has a chance to present the real incidents from history, characters other than the hero tend to dominate the scene.

Mewa Singh is an ordinary, honest, and religious Sikh, who tries to spend most of his time in the service of his fellow East Indians. The Sikh temple in Vancouver was the centre for the entire East Indian community at that time, and the community was dominated by leaders involved in the Indian Independence Movement. This was utterly disliked by the Canadian government, and by the

Immigration Department in particular. Consequently, a sharp conflict arose between the Canadian Immigration Department and the local East Indian community and was heightened by the famous Komagata Maru incident. The Indian community was subjected to harassment, intimidation, and racist attacks. Bhag Singh, president of the Khalsa Diwan Society and a leading community figure was shot dead in the Sikh temple, presumably at the instigation of Immigration Department officials. The death of Bhag Singh, the Komagata Maru incident, and other injustices were too much for Mewa Singh, who had become active in community affairs by that time. To stop further intimidation of the East Indians, he took the drastic step of killing an Immigration Department official, William Hopkinson, who was the person most hated by the East Indian community. As a result, Mewa Singh was hanged in Vancouver and emerged as a martyr and hero for the East Indians. The later chapters of the novel present moving scenes.

Jangi Qaedi, published in 1969, remains Gyani Keser Singh's best known novel. It deals with prisoners of war in Japan. However, the story is situated in South East Asian countries entirely and has no connection with Indians living in Canada.

Characterisation

Given that all the novels under consideration are historical, the heros of the novels are naturally historical figures. One difficulty in portraying such historical characters is, of course, the understandable one that the novelist can go only as far as history permits in building up his characters. As a result, personalities more powerful than that of the hero come to dominate in some cases. For example, in Shaheed Mewa Singh all the earlier situations or important incidents are dominated by such leaders as Bhag Singh, Hassan Rahim, and Bhai Balwant Singh. The novelist has little chance to develop strength of character in his hero; Mewa Singh is moved by events but remains weak as a character. It is only towards the end that he emerges as a strong personality and excels those who had earlier inspired him. A similar situation occurs in Madan Lal Dhingra, where the hero, Madan Lal, is surrounded by stronger personalities like Saworker and remains a passive observer for much of the novel. At the end he jumps almost suddenly into prominence and becomes a hero. The transition in the character is not fully developed by the novelist. The situation is different in the case of Hari Singh Usman. In this novel the hero is the one who moves the story. As a consequence, the characterisation is strong and well presented, and this is clearly the best of the novels from the point of view of characterisation. Similarly, Udham Singh remains the central figure in his novel; He creates situations and influences events. But in a case like that of Shaheed Mewa Singh, the personalities stronger than the hero have to some extent been ignored by the novelist.

Since the intent of the novelist is to immortalise the forgotten freedom fighters, Giani Kesar Singh has tried to create ideal heroes and has consequently introduced an element of Romanticism into the characterisation of the heroes or anti-heroes. But the introduction of Romantic elements conflicts at times with history and leads to shortcomings in the plot construction. On the other hand history is far too dominant and overshadows fiction. This is particularly evident, for example, in the final pages of Shaheed Udham Singh and Shaheed Mewa Singh. A Romantic attitude towards the martyrs of the freedom movement and a dedication to history, the basic elements of Giani Kesar Singh's style, cannot easily be reconciled.

Despite the fact that Singh's novels are weak as literary works, they seem to have had an important social impact, particularly in his homeland.[31.] Shaheed Udham Singh, for example, has been prescribed as a textbook for pre-university classes in Punjab and Delhi colleges. Jangi Qaedi was prescribed as a textbook in the Punjabi M.A. classes of the Delhi University. Shaheed Mewa Singh Lopoke was actually taken to Lopoke, the village of Mewa Singh, after publication, where the Punjab's Chief Minister (Premier) of the time officially released it before a crowd of approximately twenty-five thousand people, thus enhancing the importance of the work. In April 1979, the Rang Manch Association of Vancouver, at the celebrations of Wa sakhi (a Punjabi festival), honoured Gyani Kesar Singh, and Premier W.A.C. Bennett presented him there with a trophy for rendering outstanding services to Punjabi literature, language, and culture.

The drama

Drama is a latecomer on the Canadian Punjabi scene, and very few plays have been written so far. Perhaps a special reason for the little activity in this genre is the lack of proper facilities to stage the plays. Plays achieve their fullness only after they have been successfully staged in front of an audience. It takes a long time before a theatrical audience and a theatrical tradition are created in a city or in a language, and this has not happened as yet in the Canadian Punjabi context, although a single amateur group, the Watno Dur Foundation in Vancouver,[32] has been active over the last few years. The same is, of course, true for radio and TV plays, and no Canadian Punjabi radio or TV plays are known to have been written so far. There are only five Punjabi playwrights: Chohan Raj, Tarlochan Gill, Kanwal Gurdial Singh, Ravi Ravinder, and Ajmer Rode.

Two of these playwrights will not be reviewed here, since their plays were written before they came to Canada: Tarlochan Gill's poetic play, Ashoka (reprinted in Canada), about an Indian king by that name, and Ravi Ravinder's poetic play, Beemar Sadi (The sick century), even though it deals with the "counter culture" of North America and presents characters that are disillusioned with the contemporary life style and take refuge in drugs.

Although Kanwal Gurdial Singh is believed to have written a full-length play, "M.A. Pass Girl," no information is available about it. So we are left with only two playwrights, Chohan Raj and Ajmer Rode, both living in Vancouver. Raj has written one full-length play Chingari (The spark), which was published in the Punjabi newspaper Wangar (Challenge) in April 1978 (vol. 2, no. 1). It has been staged under the direction of Hari Sharma. Ajmer Rode, a poet and playwright, has written three full-length and three one or two-act plays since coming to Canada in 1967. The full-length plays are: Komagata Maru [the name of the ship], Wachittar Natak (The strange drama), and "Nooran" [a girl's name], which last is still in preparation. The shorter plays are: Dooja Pasa (The other side), Do Kurian (Two ladies), and Sunehri Darvaja or Visa (The golden gate). These plays have been read at various literary meetings in Vancouver. Dooja Pasa and Komagata Maru were staged in Vancouver in December 1977 and October 1979 respectively by The Watnu Dur Art Foundation.

The two full-length plays by Rode, Wachittar Natak and Komagata Maru, blend history and fiction. His other plays, as well as Chingari by Raj Chohan, are about social realities. Sunehri Darvaja is satirical, and Do Kurian depicts a psychological problem faced by a Punjabi housewife. Dooja Pasa is a screen and stage play; the first half is presented through dialogue, with music in the background and corresponding film slides on the screen. The second half is presented live on stage by actors. The play, produced and directed by the author and performed in this manner, was well received by the audience.

Chingari is a play that aims to create a revolutionary awareness in the working class of the world, especially among the Indian peasantry. The main theme of Komagata Maru is to expose the so-called "Great British Justice" which was so much admired when British Imperialism was all-powerful. The play also reminds Canadians of their past racism. Thus, although the play is historical, it has contemporary relevance. Wachittar Natak attempts to portray a brief but intense period in Indian history that brought about the most important cultural transformation in Punjab. Dooja Pasa deals with the crisis of a turbaned Punjabi in Canada, with the underlying thesis that an immigrant, no matter where he comes from, should strive to live with dignity and self-respect in his new homeland. Do Kurian portrays from a psychological point of view the dark side of the life of East Indian women who have recently immigrated to Canada. Sunehri Darwaja is a satire, exposing the injustices of the burocratic system that an immigrant in Canada has to go through in India and poses the question: is it worth it?

Plot, dialogue, and characterisation

Chingari (The spark)

The play centres on a poor farmer, Darbara Singh, in a village in Punjab, who, like his fellow workers, is leading a difficult life despite hard work. He is quite ignorant of the causes of his misery. One day he comes into contact with a revolutionary young man who explains to him why he is leading a miserable life despite his hard labour day and night, and how he is being exploited by the upper class and by government officials. Gradually, Darbara Singh becomes convinced that an armed revolution is the only way to free himself from the poverty and misery. With the inspiration from the young revolutionary, he organises other farmers in the village for the revolutionary cause. This alarms the local police who eventually raid Darbara Singh's house and kill him. His death is a symbol, a "spark" to awaken the downtrodden people.

The plot of the play is very simple and follows a chronological sequence of events. Instead of developing a full-scale and multi-dimensional plot, the author has chosen to adhere to a unilinear plot line that runs from the revolutionary to the farmer and his friends. There are no intense discussions or debates about the varied aspects of the theme and thus no basis for revolutionary acts towards the end of the play. The plot is therefore rather weak.

Chohan is quite successful in his diction and the language, although the first part of the play, from the absence of intense situations, lacks vigour and depth. Dialogues towards the end of the play pick up quite well. Characterisation in Chingari is quite convincing; Biru's portrayal is a success. The revolutionary young man, one of the main characters, is less effective, however, than one would expect. Despite these shortcomings, the play is a good first attempt.

Ajmer Rode's plays - Komagata Maru

The play is built around the tragedy of the Komagata Maru, a ship that arrived in Vancouver on 23 May 1914 with 376 passengers, mostly Punjabis, on board. The passengers, being British subjects and most of them ex-army veterans, expected a welcome and legal entry into Canada, a British colony at that time. They did get a welcome - but of a different kind: they were imprisoned in their own ship, refused food and water, insulted and humiliated by the Canadian Immigration Department; police and Navy personnel were used to drive them out of Vancouver waters. The incident heightened the conflict between the Immigration Deparatment and the local East Indian leaders who tried to help their Komagata Maru brethren. Finally, after two months, the Komagata Maru passengers were forced to return. But this was not the end of the tragedy. On reaching India at BajBajGhat (Calcutta), a conflict arose and the passengers were shot at, many being fatally wounded, by the British Indian Police. This shook the entire East Indian population in the world. Back in Vancouver, a local East Indian leader, Mewa Singh, shot an immigration officer, William C. Hopkinson, in a Supreme Court room, symbolising the determination of the local East Indians to fight oppression.[33]

The plot is constructed by dividing the story into three units: the *Komagata Maru* passengers, the Canadian Immigration Department, and the local Sikh temple, a centre of activities for the local East Indian leaders (situated at that time on 2nd Avenue in Vancouver). The independent actions within the three units and their interactions are united successfully in the play. Although in the story-line history tends to overpower and weaken the plot and there is some repetition from unit to unit, the play advances smoothly in time from the beginning to the end. On the whole it impresses the audience.

As far as the dialogue is concerned, the author seems quite successful; it is powerful, accurate, and saturated with the knowledge of history. The historical incidents are presented indirectly through dialogue and with musical sound effects. In many cases the dialogue originates in local situations but embodies wider content and meaning. Particularly well developed through dialogue are the characters of Gurdit Singh, the leader of the *Komagata Maru*, William Hopkinson, the immigration officer, Jean, a receptionist in the Immigration Department, and an older passenger on the *Komagata Maru*. The characters of Bhag Singh, Hassan Rahim, and Mewa Singh, however, could have been better developed. One reason for this shortcoming seems to be history itself: these three characters had the same aim and the same approach regarding the *Komagata Maru* incident. There is no difference of opinion, no conflict among them. Therefore, it is naturally difficult to make these three characters stand apart from each other. On the whole, though, the dialogue and the characterisation are, historically speaking, impressive.

Dooja Pasa (The other side)

This play portrays the aftermath of an incident in which an East Indian, Harnam Singh, was insulted for wearing his turban by some white Canadian "punks." Harnam Singh, a proud man, feels very hurt, as does his wife; and he is faced with the dilemma of whether or not to continue to wear his turban. His friend and his family offer differing views, which confuse Harnam Singh even further. Eventually, inspired by his son's arguments, he decides to keep the turban, mainly to defy racism and other unjust pressures.

The plot evolves through the discussions and arguments for and against wearing the turban. Kirpal Singh, a religious friend of Harnam Singh, wants him to keep wearing the turban for religious reasons and advises him to ignore the racist "fools." Balwant, his younger brother, questions the justification of wearing a turban in Canada and advises: "While in Rome, do as the Romans do." Harnam Singh's son, a university student, argues that, if Canada is a free country, everyone has the right to live with dignity, no matter how he dresses. Although he himself is clean shaven, he wants his father to keep wearing the turban, if he likes it. The situation becomes tense, when Harnam Singh quietly disappears from the stage, leaving everyone wondering about his decision. After a while he returns with a new turban on his head and ready to go outside again with confidence.

The dialogue in the play is quite powerful with a diction that matches the characters. Characterisation is also strong, especially in the case of Harnam Singh and Balwant. The play slows down a little, when Harnam Singh temporarily disappears from the stage, but it picks up in tempo quickly again when he comes back on stage.

Other plays

None of the other plays by Ajmer Rode has been staged, although all but Nooran have been read and discussed at literary meetings. Discussion of these will therefore be limited.

Wachittar Nataka (The strange drama) is a full-length play, depicting a great incident and its aftermath in the history of Punjab. It presents the determination of Guru Gobind Singh (the tenth Guru of the Sikhs) to transform Punjab socially and culturally and to create a man of free and brave spirit. He eventually creates the new man and fights kings and Mogul emperors in order to establish him. The play is difficult to stage, as it is long and involves the presentation of some great historical personalities.

The plot of Do Kurian (Two ladies) is built on the story of two young women who used to be friends in India and then meet again in Canada. One is married, the mother of two little daughters but leading a very unhappy life. The other is a Ph. D. student at university, and she symbolises the strong woman, while the first one is weak. The play depicts the situation when the married woman is in the process of becoming insane. Her friend has come to visit her by chance. The play is a tragedy, depicting the harsh life that many East Indian women have to face after their marriage to strangers in Canada. The dialogue is moving, and the characterisation is strong for the two female characters.

"The Golden Gate" (Sunehri Darwaja) symbolises a visa to emigrate to Canada. The plot presents the typical ordeal that an applicant has to go through in India before finally obtaining a visa. The emphasis is more on action (involving the applicant, a travel agent, as doctor's assistant, a peon, two policemen, an immigration officer, and her secretary) than on dialogue, the latter being satirical and humorous in keeping with the action.

The first half of the play Nooran takes place in India and the remainder in Canada. The plot is designed to depict the transformation of a girl of the "untouchable" class after her arrival in Canada where no one is aware of her caste. Nooran will be a full-length play when completed.

Stageability

All of the plays discussed here were written to be performed, although only three of them have so far been staged. Chingari requires only a simple set and was staged in Vancouver. Dooja Pasa, as noted above, was highly successful when staged. Komagata Maru requires an elaborate set, consisting of three parts: the Komagata Maru, an office, and a Sikh temple. Sound effects are also used extensively in the play, as some of the important scenes are created in the background. The lighting equipment for this play also needs to be very sophisticated, as advancement in the story is accompanied by the shifting of lights throughout the play. Thus the play requires professional technical assistance to bring out its full impact. When the play was staged, it met with only moderate success as a result of the poor sound system and an amateur director and actors; the set design, however, was impressive.

Of the unproduced plays, Wachittar Natak will be very difficult to produce, as it needs many different sets and background effects.

Contribution to Canadian culture

Some of the plays discussed above, for example, Komagata Maru, Dooja Pasa, Two Ladies, and The Golden Gate, go a long way to support the multicultural mosaic of Canadian society. Komagata Maru condemns racial prejudice, using an historical event, while The Golden Gate satirises Canadian immigration policies and suggests that Canada's image might well be enhanced if some of the hypocrisy in these were eliminated. Dooja Pasa shows Indo-Canadians as part of the Canadian mosaic and stresses their right to live with dignity in a free society. Two Ladies exposes the sick and oppressive environment in which many immigrant women have to live in Canada. These plays all make a modest contribution to Canadian literature. New themes, new situations, and in some cases new styles are presented in them. For the Punjabi-speaking Indo-Canadians these plays, like any other literary genre, have become a source of aesthetic enjoyment.

CHAPTER SIX

Gujarati Literature in Canada

Pragna Thakkar Enros

Introduction

Modern Gujarati language and literature have flourished from the fourteenth century AD in Gujarat - the central western part of India. Poetry was the more popular and earlier form of literature, with love and philosophy as its main subjects. Later centuries saw other experiences of life as themes. Other forms of literature, such as the short story, the novel, drama, and criticism developed later. The twentieth century has drawn more and more writers to abstract and impressionist themes as well as to a free style of writing.

The Gujarati language travelled to Africa with the large number of Gujaratis who emigrated there over the last few centuries. Today's Gujarati population in Canada is composed of people from both India and Africa, who bring with them their language, way of life, social experiences, and literature. Gujaratis in Canada are mostly professionals and business people, and, as one would expect, they are busy with their professions and new businesses. Literary activities are only their hobby. Though some of them are educated in literature and some have composed literary works before, here in their new life they can devote very little time to their literary activities. It is possible that many who could be involved in writing lack enthusiasm because there is a lack of publishing facilities. In cities where there are local publications in the form of newspapers (Toronto) or magazines (Toronto, Montreal) people try to find time to give scope to their literary urge. Only one or two writers send their work to India or the United Kingdom to be published.

In the light of the background of the writers and their present life, it is not surprising that only a small amount of literature is available. The main form of literature written is poetry. Short stories and one-act plays are also written, but they are few in number. The main themes or subject-matter of this literature can be divided into: philosophical, social, devotional, love, and other.

The literature can be divided in another way into two groups: literature influenced by Canadian or Western life and literature following traditional themes and styles. Both groups of literature are analysed below. The first group shows how Canadian or Western influences have affected the lives of people of Asian origin and how that is reflected in their literature. The second group will give some insight into Asian traditions in literature and why writers in Canada still explore traditional subjects.

Drama

Only a single play of one act, has been found: "rday nicovay gayu" (A broken Heart) (Dip, 1979, 13-15), written by M. G. Patel. The play deals with the social theme of the conflict of Eastern and Western values. It treats the idea of women's liberty. A woman's adjustment of her behaviour to fit a Western life is not understood by her husband. His sympathetic sister-in-law, who still lives a very traditional life, does understand her attitude. The sister-in-law also points out to the husband how, unconsciously, he has pushed his wife into her changed attitude. The theme raises two issues: a wife's change in attitude towards life after coming to Canada, and what has driven her to it. As the drama unfolds, it shows that on the one hand the husband admires in other women a Western style of life in dress and attitude, but on the other he cannot accept it for his wife. The dialogues are very long, the husband's change of heart is a little too sudden, but the theme is brought out very strongly in the play.

Short Stories

Five stories will be examined here. Seven more stories in another work, by Ramanik Shah, smaru sathi tamane? (Why do I remember you again and again?), published in India (1976) before he arrived in Canada, are either reminiscences of his days in India or are translations of short stories by others. They are well written stories, but will not be analysed here.

The first story "jagrtini jhalak" (The light of realization) by G. V. Patel (Dip, 1979) brings out, as in the play analysed above, the conflict between Western and Indian values of life. Though set in Africa, the basic issue is the contrast between a Western materialistic way of life and a meaningful Indian way of life. A father's single comment and a piece of advice on his son's loss of principles cause the son to reform himself and remodel his life in accordance with Indian values. The comment, "Son Anu, your soul died long ago," along with the advice: "Anu, son, the only thing I have to say to you is never to forget your real duty (svadharm) for the sake of money" plays an important part in the story. The conflict created in the son's mind by his father's comment is shown through his sudden silence, inattentiveness, and short but pointed answers to his wife's questions regarding his life. Thus, his change of heart at the end of the story, when he announces his decision to open a hospital and to use his money for the welfare of the public, seems very natural and makes the story successful. Of course, it is his love and respect for his father that makes him respond to his father's advice in that manner. His wife is made to be quite sympathetic to her husband's confused state of mind. She supports his decision to give away money for the welfare of the people. In fact, it is she who comes up with the idea of opening a hospital. Both these characters are portrayed with clarity. Even the character of the father leaves a clear impression of a god-fearing, virtuous man.

Another story, "karmaphal ke kasoti!?!" (Is it a fruit of your deeds or a test?), (Dip, 1978) by the same author, has a philosophical theme. It deals with ideas regarding life, rebirth, good and evil actions and their repercussions. The author, by narrating his uncle's life story, points to the doubts and questions surrounding the above ideas. Is there anything in life like paying for your actions? Or does God test people to see their attitude towards life? These are the two questions the author poses in the story, and whose answers remain unknown. The philosophical theme overrides the style of writing and the story becomes more like a monologue or a series of questions in the author's mind.

Three other stories share similar kinds of traditional social themes. "Swapn" (Dream), written by Rukshmani Patel, "samajani bhitarama" (Within society), written by Dhirubhai Patel (both in - Dip, 1979), and "bicara jiv" (Poor hearts), written by M. G. Patel (Dip, 1978), all describe the traditional society of India.

"Swapn" brings out the idea of fate, especially its cruelty, in a setting of traditional Indian village life. Two lovers, after struggling against social customs, are married. But happiness remains a dream for them when the husband dies soon after. "Samajani bhitarama" also has a village setting. Here, the main theme is based on customs of society which can sometimes be very cruel. Marriage customs (dowry systems and other expenses inevitable in an Indian marriage), the different classes of society, and the lower position of the girl's family in marriage are some of the elements which the author uses. The story is about a marriage where the boy's family, even though he was educated in England, expects a certain treatment and gifts from the girl's family, despite the fact that the family is very poor. The story, which is written in narrative style, ends with the girl's family deep in debt and her father's committing suicide. "Bicara Jiv" is also based on Indian customs of marriage and the differences of castes and classes. In this story, two lovers cannot marry because of social customs. The story brings out the girl's acceptance of the fate which custom has brought on her and her decision to continue living her life. "Bicara Jiv" is a very short story, woven around a brief encounter. The main incident of the story is the final encounter between the hero and heroine. She has been married to someone else for almost a year and has tried to accept her life. Her resolution is brought out when she addresses the hero only as "brother."

Though the three stories share the same basic idea, their styles are quite different. "Swapn" is a well written story with a very poetic literary style. It uses many figures of speech, the most common being simile and metaphor. Radha is compared to a flower and the men around her to bees. Sunlight is described as a silky linen of sun rays. And the red mark on Radha's forehead is called a star shining in the sky. The interesting point about these three stories is that the customs and the way of life described in them are relatively unknown to Canadian society. Indian society is changing, and these customs are now losing their foothold in parts of India, particularly in the cities. However, the authors of these stories write of these Indian traditions and customs as a universally existing way of life, and accept them without challenge. These stories may thus give an erroneous view of contemporary India. It is also interesting that, although the writers have been exposed to different problems of life in Canada, the stories still reflect the problems of a traditional Indian society. The problems and themes of the society the authors are living in have yet to appear in their work. Is it possible that the problems of present Canadian society have not yet become their own or touched them enough to appear in their literature?

Poetry

The ninety Gujarati poems discussed here cover a number of themes. The majority, forty-four, are love poems. Another twenty-nine are philosophical or spiritual. Both these themes are traditional in Indian poetry. The remaining seventeen poems deal with various subjects.

The love poems are mostly of the mature love of a husband for his wife. They embody a sensitive (srngara) aesthetic experience (rasa) of the union (sambhoga) type. Love (rati) is the basic emotion (sthayi bhava) of these poems. The majority of them portray fulfilled and satisfied love. Love for his wife has brought fulfillment to the poet. The poems "nava jivan" (New life), written by Gokul Khatri (Sabras, 1978:2), and "swapn-bhom" (Dream land) "cumi rahu" (Keep on kissing), "ek ratana" (Repeated remembrance), "hrday murtine" (To the image of my heart), "sakhine" (To the beloved), "prasadi" (God's gift), "simana" (No limit), "pritamane" (To the beloved), "smarak" (Memorial), "tane cahu" (Love you), all written by Ashwin Vaidya (in ladhi tuthi jidagini kavita, tema cha mara rasa chatan a [A collection of fifty poems] are based on this theme.

Other poems go beyond this idea and describe eternal love; that is, the love for the beloved in the next life. These poems are: "amar prem" (Eternal love), written by Harshad Patel (Sabras, 1978:2), and "man git" (Songs of heart), "vacchana" (Wish), "svagatam" (Welcome), "ses" (Remainder), and "mari kabare" (On my tomb), all written by Ashwin Vaidya.

Another important idea expressed in many poems is that of the wife's being the real strength of the poet's life. All the struggle and problems of life disappear when the poet has his wife next to him. This theme occurs in "huf mithi" (Sweet company), "apana dera" (My camping ground), "jadi buffi" (Medicinal herbs), "prerana" (Inspiration), "pratik" (Symbol), again all written by Ashwin Vaidya. "Ghor adhare" (In the darkness), by Vaidya, and "musibat" (Trouble), by Harshad C. Patel (Nav pragati, 1980), describe how the poet's wife is his inspiration even in his dreams. An untitled love poem by Harshad Patel (Sabras, 1978:2) considers love and God interchangeably. The experience of true love is equal to meeting with God. "Tu vina" (Without you) by Vaidya, has the love generated by separation as its subject. Like others of its type, it has a sensitive (srngara) aesthetic experience (rasa) but is of the love-in-separation (vipralambha) type (see note 3).

A few of the poems were written after the death of a wife or beloved. The pain of losing the beloved and the sorrow of the poet's heart are depicted very intensely in "have jyare" (Now when) by Ravindra Patel (Dip, 1979:32), "fariyad" (Complaint) by Harshad C. Patel (Nav pragati, 1980), "vidayavelae" (At the time of goodbye) and "pukar" (Calling), both by Ashwin Vaidya. There is one poem "abhilasa" (A wish), by Harshad C. Patel (Nav pragati, 1980), which describes unfulfilled, frustrated love. All these poems represent a compassionate (karuna) rasa with sorrow (soka) as their basic emotion.

The happiness of love is brought out very effectively in the musical poems (gey kavya or git) like "mangit" (Song of the heart) by Vaidya. His poems, "swagatam" (Welcome), "pukar" (Calling), "suswagatam" (Very welcome), and "mangit" (Song of heart), create an appropriate mood for their themes by suitable similes and metaphors. In "pukar" (Calling), the poet's sorrow and turmoil are expressed through a description of nature, particularly of a storm. In "suswagatam" (Very welcome) the poet tells all the elements of nature to prepare for his beloved's welcome. In this, the poem shows the influence of Dalapatram, the nineteenth-century Gujarati poet.

The preceding poets have used many well known and traditional symbols and similes. For example, a wife is compared to a poem, happiness is symbolized by a flower, and the moon is mentioned as an inspiration for lovers and the enemy of separated lovers.

Ashwin Vaidya, in his collection, has written a group of seven poems which record his love for his older brother, who played an important part in his life. Now that he is very far away, the poet feels his life to be incomplete. These love poems have affection (sneh) as their main emotion. There are very few poems of brotherly love written in Gujarati literature, and so these seven, "kadina khuto" (Never end), "pritamne" (To the beloved), "mara ramne"

(To my Ram, older brother), "ghi divali" (Oil lamp), "bathma" (An embrace), "beladi" (A partner), and "parivartan" (Transformation) are of special importance.

Two poems by Vaidya draw upon aspects of life in North America. "Tara carane" (At your feet) refers to many parts of Canada and the United States which the author would like to visit with his wife. And in the poem "huf mithi" (Sweet company), the poet mentions incidents, like Kennedy's death, which upset him and can only be forgotten in the sweet company of his wife.

The second group of poems is based on philosophy (tatvajnana - knowledge of truth), and spiritual knowledge (adhyatavidya). The tradition of spiritual and philosophical poems in Gujarati goes back as far as the poet Narsimha Mehta of the sixteenth century AD. The most important subject in these poems is "life." The worthlessness of life is the subject of "jidagina dam" (The worth of life) by Pannaben Patel (Dip, 1979:27). The relationship between life and death is the topic of a few of the other poems. Life is transitory and thus one should not be afraid of death. This is the theme of "manthan" (Turmoil) by Rasik Patel (Dip, 1978:18) and "mrtyune" (Addressed to death) by Babubhai Patel (Dip, 1979:39). The struggle to understand the meaning of life is expressed in "dagh" (A blot) by Rasik (Dip, 1979:11), "pankhidane" (To birds) by Ravindra Patel (Dip, 1979:29), and "wedana" (Pain) by Rasik (Dip, 1978:16). The struggles of life and readiness to fight them can be seen in a gazal and a sayari by Kanu Gajjar ("Bindu") (Sabras, May 1978:13, 3) and in the poem "harjit" (Defeat and winning) by Vaidya (Collection, 1964).

The complexity of life as a concern can be seen in such poems as "ekalo atula joi rahyo" (Alone and in a daze) by Harshad Patel (Gujarat Samaj Diwali Issue, 1978, Toronto), "kalima" (Darkness) by Vaidya, "lok" (People) (Nav pragati, Nov. 1979) and "avalamanjal" (Eternal journey) (Mandhata pragati, April 1980), both by Harshad C. Patel, and "intajhar" (Waiting) by Pannaben Patel (Dip, 1978:16). The importance of life and the way one lives it are discussed in "jidagi" (Life) by Jagadish Patel (Dip, 1978:34).

Few of the poems are concerned with the human race and its strange ways. "Manav bani ja" (Be a real human being) by Ravindra Patel (Dip, 1978:10), "tuku jivan labi vato" (Short life, long talks) by Harshad C. Patel (Nav pragati, Nov. 1978), and "pankhidane" (To the birds) by Ravindra Patel

(Dip, 1978:29) are examples of this idea. "Samay saritani naukano sukani" (A helmsman of a boat on the river of time) by Harshad Patel (Sabras, April 1979) tells of the importance of hope in life. The poet hears a mysterious divine voice (brah manad) advising him that hope is the real key to life. The poet very distinctly shows the influence of another Gujarati poet, Nanalal, of the early twentieth century.

A few poems discuss the importance of the different attributes of life. Friendship, for example, is the subject of "kadi" (Hook), and helpfulness of "bhale mare" (Though I have to), both written by Vaidya. Two poems, "jogine" (To a Saint) and "tapasvine" (To an ascetic - addressed to Mhatma Gandhiji), also by Vaidya, appreciate great persons and point out the duties of a real human being. The poem "dur dur" (Far away) by Harshad C. Patel (Nav pragati, March 1979) advises everyone to be cautious of this selfish world.

Some of the poems use metaphor to express their ideas regarding life. The most common metaphor is the world compared to an ocean, and life to a boat. The poet (or the hero of the poem) is described as a helmsman. An example of this can be found in "khalasi" (Helmsman) and in "vadatine" (To a cloud) both by Vaidya, and also in "samay saritani naukano sukani" (A helmsman of a boat on the river of life) by Harshad Patel.

As mentioned before, the tradition of discussing philosophy and spiritual knowledge in poetry and pointing to a moral has been very common in Gujarati literature since medieval times. Certain philosophical and spiritual concepts have been dealt with again and again by poets. The philosophical poems mentioned above are also mostly devoted to these traditional concepts. Some of the poems show a strong influence of the style and ideas of the school of the well known poet Akha Bhagat of the seventeenth century.

A third and very short section is devotional poetry. "Anand sagar" (Ocean of happiness) by Mohanbhai Patel (Dip, 1978:34) is written in the ad style, singing devotion for Lord Krishna (krsnbhakti). Another poem, "stuti" (A prayer) by Madhu Gajjar (Sabras, June 1978:2), is written in praise of a goddess and a third, "jivan bhakti" (Life and devotion), by Jagubhai Patel (Dip, 1978: 8-9) describes the importance of devotion.

The remaining poems treat different subjects from those mentioned above. "Niyamitata" (Regularity) by Jagadish Patel (Dip, 1979:39) is about a teacher's dissatisfaction with his routine life. "Maru junu ghar" (My old house) by Harshad Patel (Nav pragati, April 1980) describes the poet's old house to which he returns after many years. The poem uses a very picturesque style and appropriate similes. "Nanu junu thanu" (Small old police-station) by G. V. Patel (Dip, 1978:11) is very different from the others in this group. The inner pocket of the poet's jacket is the narrator of the poem, describing the pocket's life. The picture is drawn very vividly and amusingly, or the poet's wife is described as being jealous of the pocket. The poem has the laughter (hasya) rasa. Amusement is the basic emotion created by the poet through his odd habit of keeping the inner pocket full of all kinds of papers.

A few poems deserve special mention because they reflect the current life of poets in Canadian society. The poem "dha" (Stupid) by Vaidya (Collection, 1964) describes how modern society, through science, is trying to conquer the entire universe. The poet cannot understand this attitude of modern man. Another poem, "palabhar: swapne ke svarge? ke!?!" (For a while in a dream or in heaven? or?), by Babubhai Patel (Dip, 1979:32) is particularly interesting. It creates a vivid picture of Montreal at night. The poet describes his dream in which he imagines himself in heaven. He sees a heavenly damsel on the street hitchhiking and asking for a ride. In a subtle way, the poet shows how a certain way of life here, such as a girl hitchhiking, is not real for him, but like a dream. The poem is a good example of how ways of life in Canada are looked upon by people coming from different cultures.

There are some poems written for special occasions. "Dipane" (To the Dip) by Ravindra Patel (Dip, 1978:3) greets the opening of the new yearly magazine Dip, and "Madhata mitra mandalne" (To the Mandhata Mitra Mandala) by Ravindra Patel (Dip, 1979:19) celebrates the completion of the first year of the Mandhata Mitra Mandala Institute.

Conclusion

The literature discussed above contributes to Canadian society in two ways. It shows the conflict of values in the minds of people from South Asia and their efforts to understand Western values in their proper perspective. Furthermore, the traditions and customs of India brought out in the literature can make

Canadian society aware of the background of its Indian immigrants. This mutual understanding of values and cultures of East and West could be very useful in creating an harmonious society.

Although this literature makes a positive contribution in expressing attitudes and concerns in Canada, it lacks in literary qualities. Very few poems are written in metre. Most of the short stories are just narrations of a series of events. With the exception of "jagrtini jhalak" (The light of realisation) they lack the qualities of good literature. For example, they are not brief and significant events of life which illuminate a larger aspect of life. Nor do they unfold the story through the outer and inner conflicts of the main characters. The one-act play has a long series of dialogues between the two characters without much action and development of the plot.

The literature reviewed here, as noted above, still treats the themes of traditional Indian society. While the authors are maintaining their own roots in Indian society, their children, the second generation, are now being brought up in Canadian society. They must be experiencing the real problems and advantages of the mixing of two cultures. They should be given encouragement and opportunities to write, for from them will come Canadian literature which will reflect the multicultural experience of Canada.

APPENDICES

1. Notes

1. Among the South Asian academics writing on English literature are: Balachandran Rajan (U Western Ontario), Michael Ondaatje (York U), Inder Nath Kher (U Calgary), Uma Parameswaran (U Winnipeg), Frank Birbalsingh (York U), Saros Cowasjee (U Regina), Suniti Namjoshi (U Toronto), Réshard Gool (U PEI), Bharati Mukherjee (formerly McGill U), Prabha Mukherjee (U Regina). Some of these are creative writers as well; see the Bibliography.

2. Languages on the Indian sub-continent belong to three language families: Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, and Semitic. Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Konkani, Marathi, Punjabi, and Sinhala belong to the Indo-Aryan branch; Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and Telugu to the Dravidian; and Arabic to the Semitic branches. From the religious point of view Arabic and Urdu are associated with Islam; Bengali, Gujarati, Hindu, Marathim, and the four Dravidian languages with Hinduism; Punjabi with Sikhism; Sinhala with Buddhism; and Konkani with Christianity (in Goa).

3. Our thanks are due to Alok Mukherjee of the Toronto Board of Education, who gave invaluable assistance at this stage and also throughout the project.

4. Andracki, quoted in Norman Buchignani, "A review of the historical and sociological literature on East Indians in Canada," CES 9:1 (1977).

5. The number of South Asian professors at the University of Calgary is much larger than one might expect from the relatively small proportion (2%) of South Asians in the population (personal communication from Dr. I. N. Kher).

6. Researchers in Vancouver were: Surjeet Kalsey (Punjabi) and Shanmuga Sunderam (Dravidian). In Toronto: Pragna Enros (Gujarati), Varinder Gohal (Hindi), George John (Dravidian). Arun Prabha Mukherjee assisted in updating the bibliography of works in English.

7. One result of looking for Dravidian material was to raise the community's consciousness. There is one writer in Kannada, Dr. I. M. Muthanna, whose works are published in India and seem to be directed at a home-community audience (Muthanna Kavangur, i.e., works of Muthanna, 1, 2, and 3). It is also reported that of late Washington D.C. has become a centre of Hindu literary activity.

8. Not to mention such stalwarts as Sam Selvon of the West Indies, who has published many works while resident in the UK (see Birbalsingh), and Siri Gunasingha of Sri Lanka (U Victoria), a poet, novelist, and film director, who is credited with having introduced blank verse in poetry and the stream of consciousness technique in fiction into Sinhala.

9. Apart from the inclusion of South Asian writers in anthologies and mainstream publications, one might note the Governor General's Award to Ondaatje, the Newfoundland Arts and Letters Gold medal awarded to Weerasinghe, the University of Toronto's Norman Epstein Award and the Bronfman Foundation Award to Gool, the High School Short Story Award to Pandya.

10. Ronald Sutherland, review of Nemesis Casket in TSAR 1:2 (1983).

11. Review of This Planet Earth by Michael Hurley, "Elusive Surfaces," CL, 89 (summer 1981), 167.

12. Review of Goatsong by R. Miles in CL, 81 (summer 1979), 138.

13. Richard Wright, Black Boy (New York: Harper, 1945).

14. Excluded from discussion are five work that do not properly qualify as Canadian short stories. These are (full details are in the bibliography): Himani Bannerji, "Two Sisters"; Stephen Gill, Tales from Canada for Children Everywhere; Hardev, Folk Tales and Proverbs of Punjabi People; Suniti Namjoshi, Feminist Fables; K. L. Sadanah & S. Khanna, Prejudice of Ages and Other Stories. Gill's collection includes his "Aunt Disappears," also contained in Life's Vagaries,

discussed in this chapter.

15. Itwaru's story was not available.

16. The first wave arrived at the turn of the century in the B.C. area. This was and has remained a primarily Punjabi-speaking community. Most of the Punjabi works discussed in this study are from this community.

17. Under bilateral agreements, India, Pakistan, and (then) Ceylon were allowed a quota of 150, 100, and 50 respectively. In 1957 India's quota was increased to 300.

18. Clearly, this is an inadequate definition, for it excludes such features as the content, character, setting, language, world view, aesthetic criteria, etc.

19. "The Fiddlehead has always considered the encouragement of new and promising talent one of its main functions, if not its raison d'être" (Fiddlehead Greens, p. 5).

20. In talking about literature we need to distinguish of course, from a theoretical point of view, between the maturity of individual writers and the maturity of the South Asian Canadian short story. But, given the short history of the latter, we are in no position to discuss the maturity of the genre itself.

21. Quarry 28:4 (1979).

22. This story was written originally in Punjabi, indicating the high level which Punjabi literature has reached. See below for discussion of works in Punjabi.

23. See Nebula, 18 (1981:2) for an excerpt.

24. See TSAR, 1:3 (1983) for an excerpt.

25. David Helwig, "First Impresssions," Books in Canada, 6:6 (1977), 39.

26. Sutherland in TSAR, 1:3 (1983), 93.

27. Romantic hero of a folk-tale of love, Sherreen-Furhad.

28. Romantic heroine of a popular Punjabi folk-tale, Heer Ranaja.

29. Our thanks are due to Ajmer Rode for assistance with this section and the following one on drama.

30. Although Giani Kesar Singh is the only published Punjabi Canadian novelist, there are others who are known to be working on novels. These are: Amarjit Chahal of Squamish, B.C. (a novel which has as its subject the contemporary life of East Indians living in Canada); Surjeet Kalsey of Vancouver, B.C. (a novel which aims to portray the lives of people belonging to the lowest strata of contemporary Indian society and show how they make their fortune on crossing the ocean); Santok Chhina of Guelph, Ontario (a novel "The Unrelated People" - no further information was available at the time of writing); Ajmer Rode of Vancouver, B.C. (a novel entitled "Morning under a Mango Tree," which depicts the intense psychic experiences of a police officer. Although the story is situated in India, one of the characters is a visitor from Canada).

31. Jangi Qaedi was reviewed on All India Radio and in the Indian Literature magazine by Attar Singh, one of the leading Punjabi critics in India. Shaheed Madan Lal Dhingra was reviewed in the English Tribune in 1978. Ajmer Rode reviewed Shaheed Mewa Singh Lopoke in The Watno Dur, the literary magazine published in Vancouver, B.C. Many more reviews of these novels appeared in various newspapers and magazines published in England, Canada, and India. Giani Kesar Singh is thus one of the best known writers in the Punjabi language.

32. The Watno Dur Foundation was founded in 1974 jointly by the Watno Dur Literary Group and some visiting artists of the Punjab Kala Munch, Punjab. The objective was exclusively to develop the performing arts in Vancouver. Although only five plays have been performed by the artists of the Foundation, their efforts have helped to create some sort of theatrical environment in Vancouver, which gives

hope that more plays will be written and performed in the near future. In addition to staging the plays mentioned below, the Foundation has put on the following plays by playwrights living in Punjab: K. S. Ghuman, Munshiji (A teacher); Dr. Hacharan Singh, Ratta Salu (Red shawl); Balwant Gargi, Loha Kutt (The blacksmith). These plays were directed by a visiting artist, Yog Raj Sehda, during 1973-75.

33. The same incident has been the subject of a play by the Canadian author, Sharon Pollock. The action centres in this case on the activities of the Immigration Department.

2. Abbreviations

AR	Antigonish Review
AT	Asia Times
BAA	Bahron Aya Adami (Chahal)
BEN	Bengali
CAB	Canadian Author and Bookman
CES	Canadian Ethnic Studies
CFM	Canadian Fiction Magazine
CF	THe Canadian Forum
CL	Canadian Literature
CLT	Contemporary Literature in Translation
DB	Domestic Bliss (Bhaggiyadatta)
DR	The Dalhousie Review
EI	Elephant and Ice (Crusz)
EMGS	Elephants Make Good Stepladders (Dabydeen)
ENG	English
FC	First Clearing (Mryna Gill)
G	Goatsong (Dabydeen)
GS	Green Snow (Stephen Gill, ed.)
HAL	Home again Lanka (Weerasinghe)
HIN	Hindi
HSM	Hindu Society Magazine
ICT	Indo-Canadian Times
JCF	Journal of Canadian Fiction
JD	Jewish Dialogue
JDN	Jithe Diwaram Nahim (Ravi Ravinder)
LDM	Lakkar Dian Machhian (Sukhinder)
MPP	Modern Punjabi Poetry (Kalsey)
MR	The Malahat Review
NJ	Northward Journal
N.P.	No paging
OV	Other Voices
PJ	Poems for Jeannie (Weerasinghe)

PoC	Poets of Canada (ed. Colombo)
PP	Perdesi Punjab
PUN	Punjabi
RO	Review Ottawa
SAN	Sanskrit
SCI	Still Close to the Island (Dabydeen)
SIN	Sinhala
Sky	A Separate Sky (Himani Bannerji)
SoS	Songs of the Slave (Padmanab)
SP	Selected Poems (Weerasinghe)
SS	Shattered Songs (Itwaru)
SW	Speaking to the Winds (Kalsey)
TPE	This Planet Earth (Dabydeen)
TSAR	Toronto South Asian Review
URD	Urdu
WCR	West Coast Review
WD	The Watno Dur
WR	Wascana Review

3. Periodicals cited

Adabi Digest

The Antigonish Review (Antigonish) 1970-

Asia Times (Toronto) 1973-

Asianadian (Toronto) 1978-

Aurora: New Canadian Writing (Toronto) 1978-

Books in Canada (Toronto) 1971-

Canadian Author and Bookman (Ottawa) 1924-

Canadian Ethnic Studies (Calgary) 1969-

Canadian Fiction Magazine (Vancouver) 1971-

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